



THE TRUE STORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
AND THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM

Mikhail IROSHNIKOV

The First Soviet Government





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AND THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM

"We have created a Soviet type of state and by that we have ushered in a new era in world history, the era of the political rule of the proletariat, which is to supersede the era of bourgeois rule."

Vladimir LENIN



Mikhail IROSHNIKOV

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Translated from the Russian by
Sergei CHULAKI

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In Lieu of an Introduction:

SOVIETS AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is often referred to abroad as Soviet Russia, or sometimes as the Soviets. There is nothing surprising in this because it was the Soviets (Russian for "councils") which became the foundation of state power in the country.

Late in March 1919, the founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin, recorded eight speeches, each three minutes long, at the Moscow Kremlin. Thousands of gramophone records of these speeches were issued so that workers and peasants could hear Lenin speak about the most pressing problems of those days.

In one of these speeches he explained the meaning of Soviet power. He said: "...in the past the country was, in one way or another, governed by the rich, or by the capitalists, but now, for the first time, the country is being governed by the classes, and moreover, by the masses of those classes, which capitalism formerly oppressed..."

"In this country, in Russia, for the first time in world history, the government of the country is so organised that only the workers and the working peasants, to the exclusion of the exploiters, constitute those mass organisations known as So-

viets and these Soviets wield all state power.”*

Indeed, in the grim years of the first Russian revolution a fundamentally new type of state authority was brought forth.

On the Threshold of the 20th Century

At the time of the outbreak of the bourgeois-democratic revolution (1905-07) in Russia, the country

was torn by internal social contradictions and antagonisms. Russia was then at a fairly advanced stage of capitalism, which was just entering its highest monopoly stage, the stage of imperialism. In industrial output and in the level of technical equipment, Russia still lagged behind the leading capitalist countries: Britain, France, Germany and the United States. But on the other hand, the monopolisation of some of her industries and concentration of production had reached a high degree. In 1913, Russia had about 200 capitalist monopolies which dominated the economy; 12 leading banks owned about 80 per cent of all banking capital. The country's natural wealth and cheap labour force attracted foreign capital which accounted for 52 per cent in such leading industries as metal smelting, coal mining, oil extraction and refining, and electric-power generation. On the average, foreign capital made up about one-third of the total investment in Russia at the time.

However, the rapid development of monopoly and banking capital, and the high concentration of industrial production existed in Russia side by side with numerous survivals of the old feudal and

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 29, p. 248.

serf-owning system in all areas of the country's socio-economic life.

The main surviving feature of serfdom in the national economy was the dominance of large feudal estates owned by the Russian aristocracy. Thirty thousand landlords (including the tsar, who was the richest of them all) owned nearly as much land as did 10.5 million peasant families taken together. Unable to live off their meagre holdings, the peasants were compelled to rent land on fettering terms. All this led the peasants, who at the beginning of the 20th century made up about 70 to 75 per cent of the country's working population, to intensify their struggle against the big landowners, for better living conditions. Within four years between 1900 and 1904 there were 670 peasant uprisings, or three times as many as in the previous decade.

The proletariat, which was the second largest social class in the country, numbered about ten million, with more than three and a half million employed at factories and plants, and the remaining six and a half million employed in agriculture, the timber industry, construction work and transport. The Russian working class was fighting with increasing determination for better conditions of life and labour. Under a law passed in 1897 the working day at factories was not to exceed 11.5 hours, which made it the longest working day in Europe. In practice, however, especially at small and middle-sized factories and plants, workers had to put in 13 and even 14 hours a day and received such low wages that they and their families constantly lived just above the starvation level.

The extremely low living standards of the proletariat and the majority of the peasantry was

aggravated by their total lack of political rights. Both the economic and political oppression of Russia's working population was inseparably linked with the continued existence of the monarchy, which was the most ominous and powerful survival of the feudal and serf-owning system in the socio-political life of the country. Some ten years before the outbreak of the revolution, Russia's last tsar, Nicholas II, ascended the throne. Russia was then an absolute monarchy and the tsar had the last say in all matters of state, such as promulgation of laws, appointment of government ministers and high-ranking officials, and the running of the government itself.

In tsarist Russia in the early 20th century there were no democratic rights and freedoms such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, assembly, etc. Police surveillance over political suspects was widespread. There operated in all the *guberniyas*¹ of Russia a large political and secret police network, and the security department of the Ministry for Home Affairs was all but a state within a state. Russia had at that time 385,000 government officials, a political and secret police force of more than 100,000 and a nearly 1.5 million-strong army under the command of 40,000 officers, all of whom came from the Russian nobility.

This giant state-bureaucratic, military and police machine zealously protected the existing exploiter system and its political superstructure, the tsarist autocracy.

Political persecution and the total absence of democratic freedoms also adversely affected the interests of the Russian capitalists, who began to play

¹ See the Notes at the end of the book.

an increasing role in the country's economic development. But their opposition to the autocratic rule of the tsar did not go beyond the demands for civil liberties and for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, that is, for the curtailment of the power of the tsar and the setting up of representative parliamentary institutions. The leading political parties of the Russian bourgeoisie—the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) and the Alliance of the 17th of October (Octobrists)—were, as the Cadets' leader, Pyotr Milyukov, put it, "the loyal opposition of His Majesty, and not in opposition to His Majesty". When, following the publication of the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, the tsar, alarmed by the scale of revolutionary ferment, "granted" some democratic freedoms to the people and promised to convene a state *duma* (parliament) that would be vested with some legislative powers and elected on the basis of limited suffrage, these bourgeois parties to all intents and purposes rallied to the support of the regime in order to block further development of the revolutionary movement in the country.

The situation in Russia, at that time the focal point of the contradictions of world imperialism and its weakest link, was aggravated by the fact that it had a multi-national population. Exploitation of the working people of non-Russian nationalities and national groups, which made up 57 per cent of the population, was especially harsh. To put an end once and for all to social, class, national and colonial oppression, it was necessary above all to destroy the capitalist and big-landowner system, and the tsarist rule that supported this system. This was the objective of the three revolutions in Russia: the first Revolution of 1905-07, the February Revolution of 1917, and the October Revolu-

lution of 1917, each dealing a more powerful blow than the last at the existing system.

The chief spokesmen for the masses in town and country at that time were the petty-bourgeois Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs), which sought support primarily among the well-to-do peasants, and the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP).

The Founder of the Bolshevik Party

Vladimir Ulyanov, who is better known by his political and literary pseudonym, Lenin, was born in

the town of Simbirsk (now Ulyanovsk) on the Volga on April 22, 1870, into the family of a teacher. In 1886, when he was fifteen, his father died, and a year later his brother, Alexander Ulyanov, a student at St. Petersburg University, was executed for his part in a conspiracy to assassinate the tsar, Alexander III. The talented, strong-willed and hard-working Vladimir Ulyanov was the only member of his graduation class to be awarded a gold medal. Then he enrolled in the law department of Kazan University. But in December, 1887, he was arrested for taking part in a student rally, expelled from the University and interned in the village of Kokushkino, Kazan Guberniya. Thus, at the age of seventeen Vladimir Ulyanov became involved with the revolutionary movement, with the struggle for the liberation of Russia's workers and peasants and all working people from oppression and exploitation, and was an active participant in Marxist study circles in Kazan and Samara. Meanwhile, he studied on his own and in 1891 passed the entrance examinations for law department at St. Petersburg University. In 1892-93 Vladimir



Leaders of the St. Petersburg group of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class (Lenin in the centre).

Ulyanov worked as an assistant to a barrister in Samara and then moved to St. Petersburg where he engaged in revolutionary activities and soon became the acknowledged leader of a small circle of Marxists.

In 1895 Marxists' and workers' circles in St. Petersburg were united under Lenin's leadership into the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, which was the forerunner of the revolutionary proletarian party of Russia. On the night of December 20, 1895, Lenin was arrested and after fourteen months of imprisonment in solitary confinement was exiled to the Siberian village

of Shushenskoye, Yenisei Guberniya. There he wrote nearly 30 works, including a major study, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. After his term of exile Lenin was able to leave Russia. His first period of emigration lasted more than five years, until November 1905. During this time he lived and worked in Germany, Britain and Switzerland. Under his leadership the revolutionary Marxists and the first illegal Russian Marxist newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark) carried out important ideological and organisational work in preparation for the setting up of a new type of political party. During this period Lenin also wrote and published several books including *What Is To Be Done?* and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, in which he developed the ideological and organisational principles of a revolutionary Marxist party of the Russian proletariat. Such a party was formed at the Second Congress of the RSDLP which was held in Brussels and then in London, from the end of July to the middle of August 1903. In the election of the Party's central bodies most of the votes went to Lenin and his supporters, who were then called Bolsheviks (from the Russian word "bolshinstvo" meaning "the majority"). The other participants in the congress—opportunists and reformists—were called Mensheviks (from the Russian word "menshinstvo" meaning "the minority").

As leader of the revolutionary struggle of Russia's workers and peasants, the Leninist party of Bolsheviks pursued a consistent policy aimed at overthrowing the autocracy, putting an end to all forms of exploitation and oppression and to survivals of feudalism and serfdom, convening a constituent assembly and setting up a provisional revolutionary government made up of representatives of the people.

The Birth of the Soviets

The first Russian revolution began on January 9, 1905, after tsarist troops opened fire on a peaceful

demonstration of workers who had come to the Winter Palace, the residence of Nicholas II, to hand him a petition setting forth their grievances. The incident, which came to be known as "Bloody Sunday", roused workers throughout the country. Soon after, in the spring of 1905, workers made a first attempt to set up Soviets, or elected councils.

The first Soviet of workers' deputies in Russia emerged during a strike of textile workers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk in the spring of 1905, and served as a centre for directing the strike action. At first workers taking part in the strike put forward economic demands only; they protested against the meagre pay, hopeless poverty and ruthless exploitation. But soon after, the strike came to be led by members of a local Bolshevik organisation headed by an experienced revolutionary, Fyodor Afanasyev, and a former student, Mikhail Frunze. The textile workers were joined by workers at all the other factories in Ivanovo-Voznesensk. Soon after the strike spread to Shuya, Kineshma and other industrial towns outside the Ivanovo-Voznesensk region, involving a total of about 70,000 people.

As the strike grew, workers became more and more politically conscious and felt the need for setting up an organisation run by themselves. Thus the strikers formed the Assembly of Authorised Deputies, made up of 151 people elected at factories: 126 men and 25 women. The workers elected to the Soviet 73 Social-Democrats (Bolsheviks) who directed all its activities. That was in fact the first City Soviet of Workers' Deputies in Russia. It led the strike, organised guard duty at factories,

and maintained revolutionary order with the help of the workers' militia which it had formed specially for this purpose. They also set up food commissions (to supervise the operations of local shopkeepers and to see that the workers were supplied with food) and a fiscal commission (to collect money and provide financial help to those who needed it). The workers introduced on their own freedom of assembly, of speech and of the press, and demanded the convening of a constituent assembly, the institution of an eight-hour working day, etc. The strike came to assume a distinctly political character. All attempts to disperse the strikers by force failed. The strike lasted 72 days, and some of their demands were finally met (their pay was raised by 10 to 15 per cent, the working day was reduced to ten hours, etc.). The strike in Ivanovo-Voznesensk was an excellent school of political struggle for the proletariat, and sharply increased their political awareness. The Soviet of Workers' Deputies set up during the strike action became the first experiment in revolutionary government.

As the revolution spread across Russia, Soviets sprang up in more than 50 cities and industrial towns including St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Tver, Baku, Odessa, Rostov. The Soviets were set up on the basis of direct, equal and universal suffrage, regardless of sex, age, religious belief and nationality of the voters.

Acting as a revolutionary government, the Soviets disregarded tsarist laws and established in the cities and towns where they functioned an order of things that met the interests of the oppressed masses of working people. They introduced an 8-hour working day, established control over pay and the hiring and dismissal of workers, and

formed commissions for settling disputes involving unemployment, lockouts, rate setting in industry, improvement of living conditions and food supplies for workers. The Soviets also played a signal role in the struggle for political freedoms (freedom of assembly, speech, the press, etc.), and for the establishment and maintenance of the revolutionary order. The many-sided activities of the Soviets, which emerged during the first Russian revolution, clearly showed that they could develop from purely revolutionary bodies into government bodies. But the first Russian revolution of 1905-07 was defeated, and the Soviets failed to establish themselves as bodies of state authority.

From the February Revolution to the October Revolution

The next revolutionary upsurge began in 1910 and assumed a mass scale in 1912. The First World War accelerated the devel-

opment of monopoly capital into state monopoly capital, and stimulated the political activity of the Russian bourgeoisie which sought to take advantage of the military setbacks at the front and wrest political concessions from the monarchy. The forces of reaction were being opposed by the revolutionary, democratic part of society, with the working class at the head. The war sharply exacerbated the country's social contradictions and hastened the onset of another revolution.

The Soviets of those days were markedly different from those that had emerged spontaneously in the years of the first Russian revolution. Now they were to be found not only in cities and industrial towns but throughout the country. In March 1917, there were about 600 Soviets in Russia, which in-



The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in session.

cluded not only Soviets of workers' deputies, but also Soviets of soldiers' and peasants' deputies, i.e., Soviets with a much broader social basis. And whereas in 1905 the Soviets were only the incipient organs of dictatorship of the revolutionary segments of the working people, and not of the working population as a whole, following the victory of the February 1917 Revolution the Soviets began to establish themselves as new bodies of state authority, which was essentially a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

The February bourgeois-democratic revolution, which was carried out by the soldiers of the Petrograd army garrison and by the workers of Petrograd, overthrew the autocracy and forced the tsar Nicholas II to abdicate. On February 27, 1917, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was set up as a body of people's power. It im-



The ministerial cabinet of the Provisional Government.

plemented a number of revolutionary measures. For example, it appointed commissars and sent them to different parts of Petrograd to help set up people's government. The Soviet started the publication of its own newspaper, *Izvestia*. In those early days of the revolution the Soviet had control of the city's railway stations, the telegraph offices and printing shops. In the name of the revolutionary masses, the Soviet ordered the setting up of elective soldiers' committees in all army units and made it incumbent upon the soldiers to obey only these committees and the Petrograd Soviet. This step (the Soviet's Order No. 1) was taken to prevent the bourgeoisie from using the troops for counter-revolutionary purposes.

Thus, real power concentrated in the hands of the Petrograd Soviet. However, at that time the Executive Committee of the Soviet was headed by Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who regarded the bourgeoisie as the leading force in the

revolution, and they entered into negotiations with its representatives about forming a government.

Taking advantage of the fact that the proletariat was not yet well organised and that the petty bourgeois strata were active as never before, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks helped the bourgeoisie form a government (the Provisional Government). Thus, dual power was established in Russia: the Provisional bourgeois government and the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

In those conditions the Bolsheviks, headed by Lenin, who had returned to Petrograd early in April 1917 after nine years of enforced emigration, came out strongly against the Provisional Government and called for the transfer of all power to the Soviets, for the development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution. On the basis of thorough analysis of the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the first two Russian revolutions and especially taking into account the fact that the Soviets had assumed state power following the overthrow of tsarism, Lenin came to this major conclusion: the political form of proletarian power in Russia must be a republic of Soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, and not a parliamentary republic.

The 7th All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP (Bolsheviks) held in April, and the 6th RSDLP Congress held in Petrograd from July 26 to August 3, 1917, endorsed the main provisions, elaborated by Lenin, of a programme of action in a socialist revolution. The main points of the programme were: the establishment of a republic of Soviets, Russia's withdrawal from the imperialist war and proposal for the signing of a universal democratic peace, nationalisation of all land in the country and confiscation of the land of big landowners,

workers' control over production and distribution of goods, nationalisation of banks and large-scale industry, and abolition of all forms of social and national inequality and oppression.

Dual power, that rather curious political phenomenon, continued until July, when the leaders of the central bodies of the Soviets, who were SRs and Mensheviks, contrary to the wishes of the masses, continued class collaboration with the bourgeoisie and finally handed all political power in the country over to the Provisional Government, which took repressive measures against the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary masses. Though the period of dual power was short (from February to July 1917), it was of exceptional importance to the future of the socialist revolution in Russia. The events that followed the overthrow of tsarist autocracy showed convincingly that the Provisional Government (which was made up exclusively of leaders of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties) was not going to solve such pressing problems as the country's withdrawal from the war and conclusion of a peace, the elimination of big-landed estates, the enactment of legislation establishing an eight-hour working day, the elimination of national and colonial oppression, etc.

In the stormy months that preceded the October Revolution the bourgeois and landlord parties and the opportunist leaders of the petty-bourgeois parties and groupings who backed them on all the crucial issues, tried to frighten the working people of Russia by the possibility of a civil war in which the proletariat would inevitably be defeated if it dared take power into its own hands.*

* More detailed information about this period will be given in the booklet *How the Soviets Were Formed* by V. Startsev of this series.

THE DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

All Power to the Soviets

Shortly before the October Revolution, Russia was in the grip of a general crisis.

The continuing world war took an enormous toll of lives and public money. The economic dislocation was accompanied by increasing unemployment, peasant revolts and national-liberation uprisings, and a sharp deterioration of the food situation. Throughout the country the influence of the Bolsheviks in the Soviets grew rapidly. Their slogan "All power to the Soviets!" was a call for an uprising against the bourgeois Provisional Government, for proletarian dictatorship.

At that time there were about 1,400 Soviets in Russia, many of which had emerged in the summer and autumn of 1917. The meetings held at local and provincial Soviets showed that fundamental changes had taken place in the country: the Soviets of the northern industrial region and of Petrograd, of the central industrial region and of Moscow, of Minsk and the western region, of the Baltic area, the Urals, Siberia, the North Caucasus and the

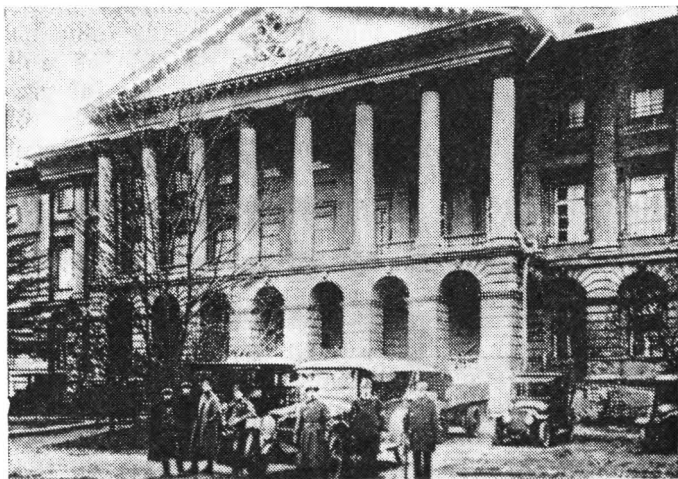
greater part of the Ukraine had endorsed the policy line of the Bolsheviks. These Soviets represented the great majority of the working people of Russia who supported the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin. Thus a revolutionary situation had emerged in which the lower strata of society—workers and peasants—could no longer live the old way, while the upper circles of the Russian bourgeoisie, even with the backing of the conciliatory leaders of the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, could no longer rule the old way. In this situation, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, acting on the initiative of Lenin, who had returned to Petrograd from Finland² early in October, passed a decision on staging an uprising in the capital, which was to be directed by the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) under the Petrograd Soviet.

Alarmed by the powerful revolutionary movement of the masses, the rapidly growing influence of the Bolsheviks throughout the country, as well as in the army and navy, and the successful preparations for the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets due to open on October 25, the Provisional Government decided to take steps to forestall the impending revolution. On its orders, early in the morning of October 24, military cadets seized the printing office of the Bolshevik newspaper *Rabochi Putj* (Workers' Path), and set up check points on bridges across the river Neva in an attempt to cut off links between the workers' communities on the outskirts of the capital and the centre. Members of the Military Revolutionary Committee were to be put on trial, and the soldiers were ordered not to leave their barracks without special permission of the military authorities, and preparations were made for an attack on the Smolny³.

The October Armed Uprising

The revolutionary forces went into action. Under the leadership of the Central Committee of the

RSDLP, the Military Revolutionary Committee, and Lenin, who had arrived at Smolny on October 24, after having had to go into hiding to avoid police persecution, the uprising got under way and spread over the whole city. In accordance with plans carefully worked out by the Bolsheviks, the revolutionary forces occupied the central telephone station and the telegraph office, Peter-and-Paul fortress with its arsenal of weapons, the railway stations, the city council building, the central post office, electric power station, and the drawbridges over the river Neva. The revolutionaries also posted guards at the State Bank and government offices. The commander of the Petrograd military district



The Smolny Institute during the armed uprising in October, 1917.

was compelled to admit that "there were no street disturbances of any kind. But government and public offices are being seized, railway stations are being taken over, and arrests are being made. Nobody is carrying out government orders from above, and military cadets are surrendering their posts without offering resistance..." By the morning of October 25 the outcome of the uprising was clear. Toward the end of the day, the Provisional Government was in control only of its residence, the Winter Palace. On the following night, after the two ultimatums of the Military Revolutionary Committee for surrender remained unanswered, the revolutionary troops, at a signal from the cruiser *Aurora* which fired a blank charge from her gun, stormed the Winter Palace, the last stronghold of the last bourgeois government of Russia.

These were the days which, according to the American journalist, John Reed, "shook the world". Fighting in the decisive battle on the side of the revolution, which was supported by many millions of working people throughout the country, were about 300,000 Red Guard soldiers and sailors. The Winter Palace was defended by 37 officers, 696 military cadets, and 75 soldiers, a total of 808 men. The overwhelming numerical superiority of the Bolshevik-led revolutionary forces over the counter-revolutionaries predetermined the early and almost bloodless victory. Whereas the events of the February Revolution earlier that year took a toll of 1,300 lives, there were six killed and 50 wounded in the October uprising in Petrograd.

On the morning of October 25, 1917, the newspaper *Rabochi i Soldat* published the text of the message of the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee, "To the Citizens of Russia", which was

also broadcast on the same day by the radio station of the cruiser *Aurora*. In this message, which was drafted by Lenin, the Committee announced the victory of the October armed uprising and the overthrow of the Provisional Government.

Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets

At 10:40 p.m. on October 25, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies opened their Second All-

Russia Congress⁴ at the Smolny. The Congress was attended by representatives of the working people from the central parts of Russia, the Urals, Siberia, the Far East region, the Ukraine and Byelorussia, the Baltic region, Central Asia, Transcaucasia and Moldavia, and delegates from the army and navy. Out of a total of 80 guberniyas in the country at the time of the October Revolution only two or three were not mentioned in the records of the congress. Also present were numerous guests including local and foreign journalists and delegations from factories, revolutionary army units and the warships of the Baltic Fleet.

This is how Smolny was described in those historic days by John Reed, who attended the congress as a correspondent for a number of American newspapers and magazines: "The space between the white columns was cluttered with rows of chairs, about a thousand in all. Most of the delegates wore soldiers' uniforms. Others the simple black shirts you can often see on Russian workers, and some wearing motley peasant shirts... And wherever you look you can see—sitting and standing, on every step of the short stairway leading to the stage, and on the edge of the stage, also on window-sills—people: workers, peasants and soldiers.

Here and there among the audience you can see bayonets glinting."

The Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets clearly showed the political bankruptcy of the Mensheviks and the right-wing section of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. At the same time it demonstrated the growing prestige of the Bolsheviks among the masses and reaffirmed the correctness of the Bolshevik Party programme for the socialist revolution. The Bolsheviks who had 390 mandates, as against the 160 mandates of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (mostly their left wing), held an undisputed majority,* which determined the work of the congress and the character of the decisions taken at its meetings.

The first congress document, the appeal "To the Workers, Soldiers and Peasants!" written by Lenin, was adopted at 5 a.m. on October 26, after the delegates had been told about the capture of the Winter Palace and about the arrest of the ministers of the Provisional Government. After unanimously approving the appeal, which was read out by Anatoly Lunacharsky⁵, the Congress proclaimed the transfer of all power, both at the centre and in the provinces, to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. Created by the revolutionary masses and profoundly democratic in their very nature and in the character of their aims the Soviets now became the sole body of power of the proletariat. "If I am asked which was the greatest and the most memorable hour of my life, I would say without hesitation that it was the hour when

* Attending the Congress were 72 Mensheviks, 14 United Social-Democratic Internationalists, 6 Mensheviks-Internationalists, 7 Ukrainian Socialists, and some others.

Soviet power was proclaimed," wrote Alexandra Kollontai⁶, an active participant in the October Revolution. "I shall never forget that extraordinary feeling of pride and joy which we felt when we heard from the rostrum of the Second Congress of Soviets at the Smolny the simple and majestic words of the historic decision: 'All power shall be transferred to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies!'"

The Congress also outlined the immediate and the most pressing tasks facing the new proletarian government. "The Soviet government will propose an immediate democratic peace to all the nations and an immediate armistice on all fronts," read the appeal. "It will secure the transfer of the land of the landed proprietors, the crown and the monasteries to the peasant committees without compensation; it will protect the rights of the soldiers by introducing complete democracy in the army; it will establish workers' control over production; ... it will guarantee all the nations inhabiting Russia the genuine right to self-determination." This important document was adopted just before the closing of the first meeting of the Congress. On the night of October 26, at the second and last meeting the Congress considered what practical steps should be taken to carry out the programme.

Peace For All Nations

The immediate signing of peace was the first demand of the war-weary working masses of the country.

That question was taken up by Lenin, the leader of the victorious proletarian revolution, in his first speech at the Second Congress of Soviets. He read out the draft of a Decree on Peace⁷ which he

принятый единогласно на заседании Все-
російскаго Съезда Совѣтовъ Рабочихъ,
Солдатскихъ и Крестьянскихъ Депутатовъ
26 октября 1917 г.

[illegible][illegible]

...французского, про-
...миссии, 22 город
...преступ, а именно
...Германии и обран
...работы этого ора
...кой, - через диспанс
...создание местного
...организаций Герман
...обран, проделан
...и историческим

[illegible]

29

peace. The decree voiced the Soviet government's readiness to conduct peace negotiations by any means—by telegraph, directly with representatives of individual countries, or at their joint conferences. The decree said that the terms offered by the Soviet government were not an ultimatum, and that the Soviet government was prepared to discuss any other proposals presented by any of the belligerent nations. The only point which the decree insisted on was that all nations should have the right to take part in negotiations which must be free from ambiguities and secrecy.

In this historic document Soviet Russia declared that it refused to have any part in the imperialist war, and it set forth the basic principles of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the new, socialist state: condemnation of imperialist wars as a means of settling disputes; establishment of peaceful and friendly relations with all countries; full equality of all nations, big and small; respect for the sovereignty of states, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.

The decree proclaimed the right of every nation, regardless of its size or the level of economic and cultural development, to self-determination, up to and including secession and creation of the independent state. The decree contained a comprehensive definition of annexation, which provided a legal basis for the struggle of nations for self-determination and national independence.

The Soviet Government denounced secret diplomacy and declared its intention to make public the secret agreements and treaties which the tsarist regime and the Provisional Government had concluded before October 25, 1917.

In conclusion, the decree expressed the Soviet Government's profound conviction that the inter-

nationalist cohesion of the worldwide working-class movement was invincible and that the class-conscious workers of the countries involved in the First World War and, above all, the workers of the three largest states participating in the war—Britain, France and Germany—would, by their determined and all-round support, help the proletariat of Russia “to bring to a successful conclusion the cause of peace”.

The delegates to the Congress approved the Decree on Peace, noting its tremendous internationalist importance. Speaking for the Social Democrats of Poland and Lithuania, one of their leaders, Felix Dzerzhinsky, said: “We know that the only force that can bring freedom to the whole world is the proletariat which is staunchly fighting for socialism.” A spokesman for the Rovno Soviet (in the Ukraine), Yakov Bazarny, said: “The Soviet I represent has instructed me to work for a cease-fire on all the fronts of war so that a just and democratic peace could be achieved. All soldiers, both those who are in trenches and those in the rear, all soldiers not only in Russia but in all the other belligerent countries, will vote for this proposal, just as I shall vote for it.”

The Decree on Peace was unanimously adopted by the Second Congress of Soviets. In this historic document the Soviet state laid down its general foreign-policy line which was aimed at ensuring peace and the security of all the nations, at developing and strengthening the good-neighbourly and friendly relations between countries. The decree expressed Lenin's idea about the possibility of peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems.

The Decree on Peace laid bare the nature of im-

perialist wars. It condemned aggressive war and declared it the greatest of crimes against humanity.

Land for Peasants

After the adoption of the Decree on Peace the Second Congress of Soviets considered another important problem which directly concerned the multi-million-strong peasant population of Russia—the problem of land.

On the night of October 26, Lenin delivered a report on a draft Decree on Land. In its first part, written by himself, he set forth the principal provisions of the agrarian programme of the Bolsheviks: the immediate abolition of the big-landed estates and the transfer of land to the peasants. The second part of the decree included the "Peasants' Mandate on Land", which was to serve as guidelines for the implementation of agrarian reforms in Russia. It was compiled from 242 mandates of peasants of various localities, drafted earlier for the First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies⁸.

The Decree on Land formed the basis of radical agrarian reforms in the country. Private ownership of land was abolished immediately and without compensation. Big-landed estates, the land of the crown, of the monasteries and the church, with all their livestock, implements and buildings, were placed in the charge of the Committees and of the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, which were to ensure the strict observance of the revolutionary rules and regulations on the confiscated estates. A special provision of the Decree stipulated that the land of toiling peasants was not subject to expropriation.

Under the Decree the peasants received for free use in perpetuity more than 150 million *desyati-*

**Центрального Исполнительного Комитета
и Петроградскаго Совета
Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.**

Адрес редакции (полный): Институт, 1-й этаж кабинета № 144. Телефон № 32-23.

Въ виду соображеній въ теченіи ближайшихъ дней Второго Всероссийскаго Съезда Съѣздовъ Крестьянскихъ Депутатовъ, **крестьянъ-делегатовъ** приглашаемъ на Второй Всероссийскій Съездъ Съѣздовъ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ **просить остаться** для участія въ работахъ этого съезда.

ДЕКРЕТЪ О ЗЕМЛЪ

[illegible]

There is extensive discussion in the article regarding the various reasons for the failure of the program, and the author concludes that the program was a failure because of the lack of a clear, consistent policy and the lack of a strong, unified leadership.

The Decree on Land published in *Izvestia* on October 28, 1917.

*nas*⁹ of land. The Soviet government also annulled their debts to the Peasant Land Bank and released them from payment of annual rent to landowners and capitalists. All livestock and implements on confiscated land were turned over to the Soviet state or to local rural communities. Land possessed by factory owners and merchants, which amounted to almost 19 million *desyatinas* before the revolution, was confiscated. The right to land ownership

was extended to all citizens wishing to till it by themselves or in cooperation with other citizens on the basis of equally shared use of the land, i.e. on the basis of its distribution according to the number of people working on it, with allowance made for local conditions. The Bolsheviks did not support the petty-bourgeois idea of egalitarian distribution of land, as outlined in the programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The Bolsheviks called for nationalisation of the land so that land would be fully controlled by the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, which were genuinely democratic bodies, and not by the rural communes which included rich peasants and were not uniform socially. But since the peasant masses of Russia regarded the egalitarian use of land as the most equitable way of solving the agrarian problem, the Bolshevik Party, headed by Lenin, decided to formalise it into law.

At the Congress Lenin explained the Bolshevik position on why the peasant mandate should be included in the Decree on Land. He said: "Voices are being raised here that the decree itself and the Mandate were drawn up by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. What of it? Does it matter who drew them up? As a democratic government, we cannot ignore the decision of the masses of the people, even though we may disagree with it. In the fire of experience, applying the decree in practice, and carrying it out locally, the peasants will themselves realise where the truth lies." * Lenin's argument convinced those among the delegates who had had doubts about the Mandate. "For me, just as for many of the old comrades, the Decree on Land was quite unexpected," recalled Ivan Flerovski, a sailor

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, p. 260.

from Kronstadt who attended the Congress as a delegate. "But Lenin was quite right: that was what the peasants wanted. We could not afford alienating the peasants and depriving the proletarian revolution of their support because of the differences between our programme and theirs." Lenin's speech and the stand taken by the Bolsheviks for turning the peasant Mandate into a state law showed that they understood and took into account the wishes of the peasant masses.

The Mandate of peasants contained other provisions which were much more important than the egalitarian use of land. The very first paragraphs of the Mandate read:

"(1) Private ownership of land shall be abolished for ever... All land (shall) become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of all those who till it.

"(2) All mineral resources (ore, oil, coal, salt, etc.), as well as all forests and waters of state importance, shall pass into the exclusive use of the state. All the small streams, lakes, woods, etc., shall pass into the use of communes, to be administered by local self-government bodies."

This in fact meant that all land in the country was to be nationalised. Implementation of this important provision of the Bolsheviks' agrarian programme, with all political power being in the hands of the proletariat, created an agrarian system in Russia which was, in Lenin's words, "the most flexible from the point of view of the transition to socialism".

The overwhelming majority of the delegates to the Congress voted for the adoption of the Decree on Land. The delegates loudly applauded K. Zhegunov, an old peasant from the Rzhev district of the Tver Guberniya, when he said that he had

"brought the profoundest respect and warmest greetings to this assembly" and when he, on behalf of the peasants who had delegated him to the Congress, expressed "gratitude to Comrade Lenin, the staunchest defender of the rural poor".

The Decree on Land played a tremendously important role in winning completely Russia's peasantry over to the side of the working class and the revolution. Later Lenin wrote: "That is exactly how the Russian proletariat *won the peasantry* from the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and won them literally *a few hours after* achieving state power; a few hours after the victory over the bourgeoisie in Petrograd, the victorious proletariat issued a 'decree on land', and in that decree it entirely, at once, with revolutionary swiftness, energy and devotion, *satisfied* all the most urgent economic needs of the *majority* of the peasants, it expropriated the landowners, entirely and without compensation."*

The Decree on Land was hailed by the peasant masses of Russia who called it "the glorious and radiant dawn of a free life" and a "sacred decree". It met the centuries-old wishes of the peasants and played the decisive role in strengthening the revolutionary alliance of the working class and the peasants, in consolidating the victory of the October Revolution.

Formation of the Council of People's Commissars

The offensive mounted by the revolutionary forces freed the whole of the capital from the control of the Provisional Government, which had in fact been isolated and lost

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 30, p. 265.

power. The Bolsheviks headed by Lenin decided that it was necessary to form a Soviet government at the Second Congress of Soviets.

On October 24, 1917, one day before the successful storming of the Winter Palace, the Bolshevik newspaper *Rabochi Putj*, voicing the demands of the Soviets and the working masses, carried an editorial entitled "What Do We Need?" It read in part: "The present government of landlords and capitalists must be replaced by a new government of workers and peasants. It is necessary that the present self-styled government, which has not been elected by the people and which is hence not responsible to the people, must be replaced by a government which is recognised by the people, elected by representatives of workers, soldiers and peasants, and is responsible to these representatives."

Taking into account the multi-sectoral¹⁰ character of the socio-economic structure of Russia and the preponderance of a rural population in the country, the Bolsheviks, headed by Lenin, considered it possible and even desirable that, together with the party of the working class, representatives of other democratic parties which expressed the interests and enjoyed the support of different strata of the working population of the country, and primarily the peasants, should take part in forming the Soviet government. The only condition for this cooperation was these parties' acceptance of the proletarian revolution, of the socialist platform and the decrees of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets. However, the Mensheviks and the rightist, counter-revolutionary wing of the Socialist-Revolutionaries walked out of the very first meeting of the Congress on October 25.

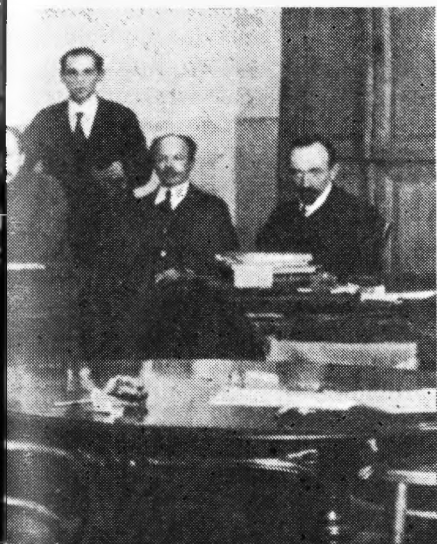
Addressing a conference of regimental commanders of the Petrograd garrison on the fourth day



after the victory of the October armed uprising Lenin said: "It is not our fault that the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks have gone. We asked everyone to take part in the government. Here everyone knows that the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks went because they were left in a minority. The men of the Petrograd garrison are aware of this. They know that we wanted a coalition Soviet government. We did not exclude anyone from the Soviets. If they do not want to work with us, so much the worse for them." *

Supporting the idea of forming a government by agreement with other parties on the basis of the platform of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, the Central Committee of the RSDLP (Bol-

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, pp. 269-270.



The Council of
People's
Commissars, the
first Soviet
government.

sheviks) on October 26 proposed that the future Soviet government include prominent members of the left-wing SR leadership: Boris Kamkov, Vladimir Karelin, and others. But the left-wing SRs continued to insist on a "uniform socialist government" made up of representatives of all the democratic parties, including the Mensheviks and right-wing SRs who had walked out of the Second Congress of Soviets. Having failed to reach agreement with the left-wing SRs, the Bolsheviks decided to form a government without the other parties. Thus fourteen members of the Leninist party were nominated ministers of the new, socialist government.

The decree on the Formation of a Workers' and Peasants' Government reflected the Bolshevik Party's search for new forms of government organisation and its attempt to set up a proletarian gov-

ernment apparatus which would combine the principles of collective leadership and its undivided authority and which would have close links with the mass organisations of workers, sailors, soldiers, peasants and office personnel.

In accordance with Lenin's draft of the decree, the conference of the RSDLP Central Committee decided to form special commissions which would supervise the work of different departments of the government and thus ensure implementation of the socialist programme adopted at the Second Congress of Soviets. These commissions were headed by People's Commissars who were to make up the new proletarian government, the Council of People's Commissars. The use of the word "Soviet" (council) for the future government was significant, for it showed that the government was born of the revolutionary spirit of the working people of Russia. The title "commissar" replaced the old title "minister", which in the minds of the people was associated with the capitalist and landlord state machine of oppression and exploitation. And, finally, the word "people's" reflected the character and spirit of the new proletarian government, a government of workers and peasants.

They Were First People's Commissars

At the end of its second and last meeting the Congress adopted the decree on the formation of the first workers' and peasants' government—the Council of People's Commissars—and approved the list of its members, who all belonged to the Leninist party of the working class of Russia.

The Council of People's Commissars which,

under the decree, was to carry out government functions under the control of the All-Russia Congress of Soviets and its Central Executive Committee¹¹ consisted of thirteen commissariats: for internal affairs, agriculture, labour, commerce and industry, public education, the army and navy, finance, justice, foreign affairs, food supply, postal and telegraph services, nationalities affairs, and railways. Having approved the composition of the first Soviet Government, the participants in the Congress elected Lenin, the leader of the socialist revolution, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. As John Reed wrote, mention of Lenin's name was greeted with long and tumultuous applause. The people had entrusted the Bolsheviks with the management of the country's affairs.

Anatoly Lunacharsky was appointed People's Commissar for Public Education. A French newspaper at that time described Lunacharsky as the most cultured and the best educated of all the ministers of public education in Europe. The army and the navy were headed by three People's Commissars: Vladimir Antonov-Ovseyenko, one of the leaders of the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee, who had had a military education; Nikolai Krylenko, a junior NCO in the army; and Pavel Dybenko, a Baltic Sea sailor. All three men were popular with soldiers and seamen. The post of People's Commissar for Nationalities Affairs went to Iosif Dzhugashvili-Stalin, who was familiar with the life and needs of the multinational region of the Caucasus (in the south of the country). The People's Commissar for Labour was Alexander Shliapnikov, one of the leaders of the trade union (the country's largest) of iron and steel workers. The Commissariat for Postal and Telegraph Services was headed by Nikolai Avilov-Glebov, who

Vladimir
Antonov Ovseyenko.



was a member of the Executive Committee of the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions.

There were two changes in the composition of the first Soviet government as described in the decree of October 26, 1917. Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov and Georgi Oppokov-Lomov, appointed People's Commissars for Finance and Justice respectively, were unable to take up their duties because they were needed for Party work and work with the Soviets, and had remained in Moscow. In their place Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, who had taken an active part in the February and the October Revolutions, a commissar of the Military Revolutionary Council at the State Bank, was named People's Commissar for Finance and Pyotr Stuchka, a lawyer, a delegate to the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, and a member of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of Soviets, was named People's Commissar for Justice.

In the first few months after the October Revolution, there were other important changes in the



Grigori Petrovsky.

composition of the first Soviet Government (because of activities of an opposition group in the government; the setting up of new government departments; the absence of some members of the Council of People's Commissars who were away on government assignments in different parts of the country and so on). For example, the important post of the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, at first held by Alexei Rykov, who later became a member of the Supreme Council of the National Economy ¹², was filled by Grigori Petrovsky, a delegate to the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, formerly a fitter at the Providence Works in Mariupol, and a member of the Fourth State Duma (parliament); Vladimir Milyutin, Deputy People's Commissar for Agriculture, was replaced by Alexander Schlichter, a former member of the Moscow Gubernatorial Zemstvo ¹³ (provincial council). The People's Commissariat for the Homeless (set up in December 1917) was headed by Alexandra Kollontai.

Alexandra Kollontai.



However, these and other appointments and replacements did not alter the essence and the class nature of the first workers' and peasants' government—the Council of People's Commissars—which was elected at the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets and which differed, not only in the manner in which it was formed but also in the very nature of its makeup, from the tsarist and capitalist governments of old Russia.

The overwhelming majority of the members of the Council of People's Commissars headed by Lenin, were workers, peasants, members of the democratic intelligentsia and of broad sections of office workers and servicemen. The Council of People's Commissars was a model of multinational government uniting representatives of working people of all nationalities, big and small, in their struggle against exploitation and oppression: Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews, Poles, Latvians, Armenians and Georgians.

The working people of Russia had every reason

to be proud of their government, which was composed of the most outstanding members of the Bolshevik Party, its leading spokesmen and organisers. Of the 90 men and women who took a continuous and active part in the work of the first Soviet Government in 1917-18 (People's Commissars and their deputies and leading staff members) 51 joined the Bolshevik Party before 1904, 20 between 1904 and 1908, and 19 between 1908 and October 1917. The age structure was as follows: 15 persons were of 47 to 55 years of age, 39 persons—37 to 46, 33 persons—27 to 36, and three were under 27. Fifty-one of the members had either a complete or incomplete university education (in the latter case education as a rule was interrupted because of police persecution for revolutionary activities), and 18 had a secondary or specialised secondary education, after which they studied on their own in the "revolutionaries' universities" of tsarist prisons, in exile or during emigration abroad.

The Bolshevik Party assigned to the posts of People's Commissars and other important posts in the Soviet state apparatus primarily those of its members who had experience in revolutionary work, among them lawyers, physicians, journalists, military specialists, engineers, economists, chemists, mathematicians, biologists and statisticians. Many of them had studied or lived abroad, knew foreign languages, were good speakers and political writers. Even those who had little sympathy for Bolshevism had noted this. Colonel Raymond Robins, who headed the American Red Cross Mission in Russia in 1917, pointed out, for example, that the first Council of People's Commissars, as a cabinet of government ministers, had no equal in the world for the number of books written by its members,

the number of languages they knew, and for the general level of their culture and education.

A New, Proletarian State Power

The decree on the formation of the Council of People's Commissars was the most important, though not

the only act of the Congress which led to the establishment in Russia of a new, workers' and peasants' state power. In addition to this decree the Congress adopted two resolutions on the establishment of Soviet power in the localities and in the army. One of these resolutions, addressed to all local Soviets, formalised the transfer of power to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. The ministers of the former Provisional Government were dismissed. The chairmen of local Soviets were instructed to decide all matters after consultation with the central revolutionary government. The other resolution of the Congress, addressed to armies in the field, proposed the setting up in all armies of interim revolutionary committees the decisions of which would be binding on top commanding officers and which would thus be responsible for maintaining the revolutionary order.

Thus, from the Soviets of 1905, which Lenin called the nucleus of revolutionary power, and from the Soviets in the February Revolution, which were the organs of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, the Soviets, after October 25, 1917, developed into bodies of authority of the new state of workers and peasants.

The creation of the Council of People's Commissars, a government of workers and peasants, which was a fundamentally new type of government both

in its social character and in its purpose, was also a most important step towards the establishment of proletarian statehood in Russia. The Soviet government unified the Soviets throughout the country into one system. Simultaneously with the setting up of the Council of People's Commissars, the Congress of Soviets proclaimed the principle of unity of the central and local bodies of new state power.

On October 28, 1917, the newspaper *Izvestia* said that "the Second Congress of Soviets had set up a new type of government, a government of the people, linked with people's organisations and working together with them and through them, and has thus established a rule of the people and by the people themselves".

THE DAWN OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOVIETS

"But We Didn't Know How to Govern the State"

All the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties and splinter groups were convinced that the Bolshevik-led proletariat now in power would not be able to cope with the task of state administration. That was indeed a formidable task since the working class and the revolutionary peasantry had no experience of government. But one thing was clear: the old state machinery with its military force, police and officialdom must be smashed. This did not mean, however, turning away all specialists and managerial personnel who worked under the old regime. On the contrary, as Lenin said even before the victory of the socialist revolution, it was necessary to make maximum use of the expertise and managerial experience of the old specialists.

However, when the People's Commissars, unarmed, singly or together with several comrades, arrived at the former ministries, they came up against fierce opposition by the staff who resorted to sabotage, which was a weapon just as sharp as a bayonet or sabre. "The inaction of the administrative personnel posed a greater danger to the Bolsheviks than the offensive of the military cadets and Kerensky¹⁴ himself," wrote the journal *Trubuna Gosudarstvennykh Sluzhashchikh* (The Tri-

bune of the Civil Servants), the organ of government officials of Petrograd in those days. "Kerensky could be arrested, and the military cadets could be shot and killed with cannon, but even the best cannon cannot replace even the worst typewriter, and the bravest of sailors cannot take the place of the meekest office clerk at some government department... Without a state mechanism, and without the apparatus of power the entire activity of the new government is like a machine without transmission belts: it will turn and turn but no work is done." In this extremely difficult situation, it was necessary for the newly-born Soviet government to take over all the levers of the country's control within the shortest possible time.

The main organiser of the building of a socialist state in Russia was Lenin's Bolshevik Party.

In the months following the October Revolution, when everything was being done anew, for the first time, the selection and training of government workers was one of the main concerns of the Bolshevik Party and the Council of People's Commissars. The Commissariats and their departments needed knowledgeable, skilled and experienced people. But where were they to be found? The old specialists were in no hurry to offer their services to the Soviet government. Some among them took a wait-and-see attitude, others were paralysing the work of the government through inaction. "We were in an extremely difficult situation," recalled Georgi Oppokov-Lomov. "There were many excellent and highly qualified specialists among us, and there were also many dedicated revolutionaries who had travelled across Russia, walking in chains, the whole heart-breaking road from St. Petersburg or Warsaw and Moscow, to Yakutia and Verkho-

yansk... But we didn't know how to govern the state; we knew nothing of banking techniques or the work of government ministries." Yet, in spite of the difficulties, the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet Government led by Lenin succeeded in the stupendous task of building a new state machinery.

Guided by the tested principle (applied during the years of underground work before the revolution) of selecting the right people for the right task, with account taken of both the political and personal qualities of the prospective civil servant, the Bolshevik Party was able to fill the posts of People's Commissars with its best cadres. These were courageous and energetic people who combined a total devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution with organising skills, people capable of achieving good teamwork in large collectives. But sometimes it happened that long-time revolutionaries, along with rank and file members of the Party, when told of their new appointments would decline the offer, saying that they were not sufficiently experienced and knowledgeable, and asked to be allowed to remain in their old, less responsible jobs. But the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars would not hear of this.

"I have not enough experience either," Lenin used to say. "We have to learn. It is ridiculous to think that the state can be run only by the rich, or only by officials that come from rich families."

The first census taken after the October Revolution, in August and September 1918, of government personnel in Moscow showed that the highest percentage of Bolsheviks—52.2 per cent (408 people) was in the All-Russia Extraordinary Commission which was set up to fight counter-revolutionaries, saboteurs and speculators, and in the People's



Yakov Sverdlov.

Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (46.8 per cent, 134 people). They were followed by the People's Commissariat for the Nationalities Affairs (38.3 per cent), the Main Office of the Council of People's Commissars (27.5 per cent), the All-Russia Central Executive Committee (15.7 per cent), and the People's Commissariat for Justice (20 per cent). In most of the other central government offices, Communists made up from 2 to 10 per cent of the employees.

As Yakov Sverdlov¹⁵, Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, said at the Seventh Extraordinary Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)¹⁶, the Bolshevik Party "has put heart and soul into the Soviets, and has been conducting its main work through the Soviets and in the Soviets". By the end of 1918, of the 874 members of the provincial Executive Committees in 29 guberniyas of central Russia alone, 724 were Communists; and of the 4,046 members of rural district Executive Committees 2,625 were Communists.

Felix Dzerzhinsky.



A Soldier of the Bolshevik Party

Below is a brief biographical sketch of one of the most outstanding leaders of the Bolshevik Party, one of those men whom Lunacharsky called "Lenin's marshals". He was Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877-1926). The son of a small landowner from the Vilno Province, he began to carry out revolutionary propaganda among the workers while he was still a secondary school pupil. An active member of the revolutionary movement in Russia and Poland, Dzerzhinsky was one of the veteran members of the Communist Party. He spent more than eleven years in prisons and penal colonies and in exile, from which he escaped three times. In the October Revolution he was one of the leaders of the Petrograd All-Russia Revolutionary Committee, an elected delegate to the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, and a member of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and of its presidium. At Lenin's suggestion the Council of People's Com-

missars appointed him Chairman of the All-Russia Extraordinary Commission (Cheka) on December 7 (20), 1917. "Only a man with a cool head, a fiery heart and clean hands can be a Chekist," Dzerzhinsky used to say. In later years the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government entrusted him with the most difficult and the most responsible tasks. In 1919 he was appointed People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, and later People's Commissar for the Railways, Chairman of the All-Russia Council of the National Economy, and Chairman of the Commission for the Improvement of the Life of Children. He held those posts while remaining head of the All-Russia Extraordinary Commission. This slim man, always alert and attentive, with his thin, inspired face, sharp eyes, and the characteristic goatee, was popularly known as the "knight of the revolution", "Iron Felix" and the "chief commissar of the invisible front". Dzerzhinsky regarded himself as a soldier of the Bolshevik Party and gave his all to the revolution and to the working people. Replying to a questionnaire in the autumn of 1918, about the condition of his health and about the number of hours he worked each day Dzerzhinsky wrote: "Not too good" and "As much as necessary". These laconic replies need no comment.

Cooperation with Democratic Parties

While holding the key positions in the state apparatus, the ruling Bolshevik Party did not shun cooper-

ation with other democratic parties which supported Soviet power and its decrees. As said earlier, the first Council of People's Commissars elected at the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets was a one-party body for the leaders of the left-wing SRs

rejected the Bolsheviks' invitation to join the first Soviet government. Later, from December 1917, seven left-wing SR leaders took part in the work of the Council of People's Commissars (five of them were appointed People's Commissars). The Bolsheviks took a favourable view of such a coalition, and Lenin spoke about this on several occasions. But as early as March 1918, the left-wing SRs used the signing of the Brest Peace Treaty as a pretext for withdrawing from the Council of People's Commissars and launched an armed struggle against the Soviets.

It should also be recalled that the All-Russia Central Executive Committee (the Soviet Parliament), the highest body of state authority in the country, which was elected at the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, was a multi-party body. Besides 62 Bolsheviks, the 102-member Soviet Parliament included left-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries, Social-Democrat Internationalists, Ukrainian Socialists, and Maximalists. After the All-Russia Central Executive Committee was merged with the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies and came to include representatives of the army, navy and the trade unions, it had, in January 1918, a total of 378 members, with the Bolsheviks in the majority.

It is noteworthy that for a long time not only the above-mentioned parties, but also the parties which had left the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets and then openly opposed the power of the Soviets, were allowed to exist as legal political organisations, to take part in elections and to have their representatives in local Soviets, at gubernatorial and all-Russia congresses of Soviets. It was only after the complete bankruptcy of the petty-

bourgeois parties, after they had lost the trust of the masses and after the class struggle in the country had developed into a civil war, that socio-political conditions emerged for the creation of a one-party system.

There is still another important circumstance that should be noted. A study of the experience of the Soviet state in the years 1917 and 1918 shows the complete groundlessness of the allegation that the Soviet government excluded members of other democratic and socialist parties from the state apparatus. The first census taken of Soviet government personnel in Moscow shows that not only after the left-wing SR leaders had withdrawn from the Council of People's Commissars in the spring of 1918, but even after their failed attempt to stage an armed insurrection against the Soviet government on July 6, 1918, the new state apparatus set up by the Bolsheviks still included left-wing SRs and members of many other parties (right-wing and centrist Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Anarchists, People's Socialists, the Trudoviks, etc.).

New Staff for the New State Apparatus

On November 4, 1917, *Pravda* wrote: "The new Soviet government of People's Commissars, which has taken on the difficult task of reshaping the life of the workers, soldiers, peasants and all the other working population along the new principles, needs skilful and loyal cadres in all areas of economic life of the state." The only correct answer, in the opinion of the Bolsheviks, was to draw the masses into the building of the proletarian state apparatus. Lenin said that there was a tremendous reserve of organisational talent among the working class and

the peasantry waiting to be tapped. Lenin called for a patient search that would bring forth skilled organisers, people who adopted the ideas of socialism and were intelligent and practical-minded, and for their appointment to key government posts.

An ordinance of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, November 17, 1917, said that it was necessary "(1) to make an immediate and clean break with the rotten bourgeois prejudice that only bourgeois officials can run the state, (2) to divide without any further delay the district and city Soviets into department which will assume the duties of state governments, each in its particular field, (3) to draw the more politically-conscious and organisationally talented comrades now working in factories and serving in the army into the activities of such departments and thus enable them to help the People's Commissars."

Among the first office workers in the Soviet government apparatus were veteran Red Guard men from Petrograd, who worked as telephone switchboard operators in Lenin's office, while at the same time serving as Lenin's bodyguards. They were headed by P. Polovinkin, a metal smelter. With recommendations from a district Party committee K. Koksharova came to the Smolny to work in the Secretariat of the Soviet government. Yu. Sergeyeva, a woman worker, was employed in the Central Office of the government. Among the revolutionary soldiers and sailors who worked as guards at the Smolny were S. Zheltyshev, a soldier in the machine-gun crew of the Volynski Regiment, and A. Zhuzhzhlov, a sailor of a minesweeper of the Baltic Fleet.

Working people also took a direct part in the organisation of the Soviet People's Commissariats'

apparatus. Among the first to come to work at the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, together with I. Zalkind and N. Markin, both Bolsheviks, were workers from Vasilievsky Island (a district of Petrograd) and from the Siemens Schuckert plant (now "Electro-apparat"), and revolutionary soldiers of the Pavlovsk Regiment and the Baltic Fleet sailors. An important part in organising the People's Commissariat for Labour was played by the trade unions of Petrograd workers, and especially, metal workers and textile workers. Taking part in the organisation of the People's Commissariat for Public Education, together with Anatoly Lunacharsky and Nadezhda Krupskaya¹⁷, was a group of workers from factories of the Vyborg district of Petrograd. This group was headed by Fyodor Kalinin, a member of the Party since 1903. The first office personnel at the People's Commissariat of Social Insurance were medical nurses, doctors' assistants, and workers and mechanics from the Petrograd factories; on the staff of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs were workers from the Putilov Steel Plant and students of Petrograd University, the Electro-Technical Institute and other educational establishments; the People's Commissariat for the Railways employed a group of non-Party printing workers and Bolshevik workers from the central workshops of the North-Western Railway.

Thus the Soviet government sought to draw working people into the day-to-day work of state administration. This was to be "the magic way" which no other government anywhere in the world had known and which would make it possible to increase tenfold the forces of the new proletarian state, said Lenin even before the October Revolution.

**Businesslike
Cooperation with
the New
Government**

In two of his works written before the October Revolution, *The State and Revolution* and *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* and later, in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, written in April 1918, and other post-October works and speeches, Lenin discussed the problem of the use of bourgeois specialists and members of the intelligentsia in the building of socialism. It was necessary to remove those who were violently opposed to the new government and to replace them with new specialists and office workers who would be under the supervision and control of the Soviets, insisted Lenin. It was necessary to build socialism on the very cultural and economic foundation left behind by capitalism, and with the help of those whom the new society had inherited from the old. Lenin wrote that "it is not enough to crush capitalism. We must take the entire culture that capitalism left behind and build socialism with it. We must take all its science, technology, knowledge and art. Without these we shall be unable to build communist society. But this science, technology and art are in the hands and in the heads of the experts."* Lenin pointed out that most of the ordinary bourgeois office workers were no better off than the proletariat or semi-proletariat. Therefore the best organisers and specialists could be induced to cooperate in a businesslike way with the new government only if they were paid high salaries.

Early in 1918 the flexible and far-sighted policy of the Soviet government, which combined revolutionary action against saboteurs with large-scale

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 29, p. 70.

explanatory work among bourgeois specialists and members of the intelligentsia, put an end to sabotage by government workers. A tremendous role in widening cooperation between members of the old-time intelligentsia and the Soviet state was played by Lenin's *Draft Plan of Scientific and Technical Work* and the measures that were taken to carry out the plan.

The following figures show how much the new Soviet government did to draw old-time specialists and members of the bourgeois intelligentsia into cooperating with the Soviets. In about a year, by July 26, 1919, some 29,122 specialists, and in 1920, a total of 50,275 specialists were employed at various industrial establishments as well as departments of the People's Commissariats.

Constituent Assembly

Lenin called the period between October 25, 1917, and February 1918, a pe-

riod of the triumphant march of Soviet power, which extended very rapidly across the vast territory of Russia. Suffice it to say that in 80 out of the country's 97 large cities Soviet power was established in a peaceful manner. It should be recalled here that as opposition to tsarism mounted in the early years of the 20th century, the call for the convening of a constituent assembly on the basis of universal suffrage was extremely popular, for the majority of the population thought that this would do away with tsarist autocracy, resolve the agrarian problem and give them political rights and freedoms. After the victory of the October Revolution, the Soviet government took immediate steps to satisfy the urgent demands of the people. However, the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties,

7

which had been in power after the February Revolution and which had for eight months tried to put off the calling of a constituent assembly, now launched a noisy campaign in support of it. In so doing they hoped to undermine the prestige of the Soviets, to discredit the Soviet government.

After a careful assessment of the political situation in the country the Bolsheviks also supported the idea of the convening of a constituent assembly, even though they considered it no longer necessary, either politically or practically. But they believed that they must consider the actual state of political awareness and maturity of the whole working class, and not just that of its communist vanguard. In his work *'Left-wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder* Lenin wrote: "...we must not regard what is obsolete to us as something obsolete to a class, to the masses."

Thus, the Bolshevik Party decided that the masses should have an opportunity to see for themselves the counter-revolutionary essence of many state assemblies and local assemblies and rid themselves of the parliamentary illusions connected with the fetishisation of a constituent assembly.

Elections to the constituent assembly were held on November 12, 1917, the date appointed by the old Provisional Government. The elections took place in a very complex situation. The establishment of Soviet government was still under way in many cities and towns, and especially in the rural areas. A large part of the population, in particular the peasants living in remote provinces, had not yet learned of the Decree on Peace and the Decree on Land adopted at the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, and of the other revolutionary changes. On the other hand, the lists of candidates from

different political parties running for the constituent assembly had been drawn up and published still before the victorious socialist revolution. That is why, for instance, the electors voted in the whole bloc of Socialist-Revolutionaries. But this party had in fact ceased to exist by the end of 1917, being split up into two factions: the right-wing SRs who were in open conflict with the Soviets, and the left-wing SRs who had formed an independent party and supported the Leninist Council of People's Commissars.

The election results were as follows. Of the total of 750 deputies, 175 were Bolsheviks, 40 were Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, 86 representatives of small national groups, 17 Cadets, 15 Mensheviks, and two People's Socialists. All the other seats at the constituent assembly were held by the right-wing SRs. That, however, was a purely formal, Pyrrhic victory for the right-wing Socialist-Revolutionary Party, one that did not reflect the genuine will of the peoples of Russia.

The Bolshevik Party won a majority of votes at the elections in the central, more advanced regions of Russia, in Petrograd and Moscow, and in large provincial cities of the country. The list of Bolshevik candidates was supported by almost 50 per cent of the army, including an absolute majority of the sailors of the Baltic Fleet and the soldiers of the northern and western fronts. All the garrisons stationed in large cities voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Bolshevik candidates. Upon checking, the large number of the votes that went to the SRs became doubtful. In the first place, it was due to the fact that there was a single bloc of candidates who represented both the right-wing and the left-wing SRs. Secondly, in several guberniyas the ballots contained only the names of the bourgeois and



On July 10, 1918, the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets adopted the first Soviet Constitution.

petty-bourgeois parties, and many voters simply declined to have any part in such elections.

On January 3, 1918, the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of Soviets heard Yakov Sverdlov's information concerning the opening of the constituent assembly and adopted Lenin's draft of the *Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People* which the Bolsheviks were to submit to the assembly. The Declaration became in fact the first constitutional act of the Republic of Soviets, a document which defined the position of working people in socialist society. Taking into account earlier Soviet government decrees, the Declaration summed up the socialist changes which had been carried out in the country in the first few months since the October Revolution. It proclaimed the principal tasks of Soviet power: to abolish all kinds of exploitation of man by man, to sup-



press the exploiters, and to establish the socialist framework of society.

Speaking at the Tavrida Palace in Petrograd on January 5, 1918, Yakov Sverdlov, on behalf of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of Soviets, read out the Declaration and proposed that the principles of the new social order proclaimed in its text be approved in the interests of the working people of the country. But the counter-revolutionary majority of the constituent assembly refused even to discuss the Declaration submitted by the Bolsheviks, thus exposing the anti-popular character of the assembly. After a short interval the Bolsheviks, on Lenin's proposal, left the hall de-

claring that they would not take part in the activities of a reactionary gathering which had openly shown its hostility to the revolution, to the workers and peasants. Their example was followed by the left-wing SRs, then by the representatives of Muslim and Ukrainian national groups.

On January 6, 1918, just 12 hours and 40 minutes after it was convened, the constituent assembly, a creation of the counter-revolution, came to an end. It was dissolved by a decree of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee. The decree had the wide backing of workers, peasants and soldiers. Adopted at a time when Soviet power was being rapidly established throughout the country, it completed the process of the breaking up of the old bourgeois state machine and thereby consolidated the principal gain of the October Revolution: the transfer of all power in Russia into the hands of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies.

The First Soviet Constitution

The Soviet central state apparatus had in the main been formed by the beginning of July 1918, that is,

by the time of the convening of the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets. Considerable successes had been achieved in the building of a Soviet state system in the provinces. Altogether by the middle of 1918 there were 12,000 Soviets in Russia.

On July 10, 1918, the All-Russia Congress of Soviets adopted a constitution of the RSFSR, the first Soviet Constitution, which incorporated the full text of the Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People. The Constitution gave legal force to the gains of the October Social-

ist Revolution: Soviet power as the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, abolition of private property of capitalists and big landowners, and equality of all nations and nationalities in Russia. The Constitution ensured the right of the working masses to take part in state administration, in managing the affairs of the socialist society that was being built.

Describing the significance of the first Soviet Constitution of the victorious proletarian state Lenin said: "The Soviet constitution is... not the invention of a commission, nor the creation of lawyers, nor is it copied from other constitutions. The world has never known such a constitution as ours. It embodies the workers' experience of struggle and organisation against the exploiters both at home and abroad." *

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 145-146.

DEFENCE OF THE REVOLUTION

The Brest Peace

The revolution had won, but Russia was still in the grip of economic dislocation following four years of war. The people wanted peace, so that they could start building a new life. However, both the countries which were still at war with Russia and her former allies refused to begin peace negotiations. Moreover, the armed forces of the bloc of countries headed by imperialist Germany continued to extend the boundaries of the territory they had occupied in what had been the Russian Empire. A particularly dangerous situation had shaped when German troops advanced from Byelorussia and the Baltic areas in the direction of Petrograd. In these circumstances the Soviet government was compelled to start separate talks with the German bloc, which were held in the town of Brest-Litovsk. On March 3, 1918, it signed the Brest Peace Treaty with its extremely harsh terms for Russia. Under it Russia lost a territory of about one million square kilometres (the Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, part of Byelorussia, and a number of districts in the Caucasus). Soviet Russia had to demobilise its army and navy and to pay a large indemnity to the Germans.

Foreign Military Intervention

The peaceful respite which the Soviet republic had obtained by signing the Brest Treaty was very

short. In the summer of 1918 Soviet Russia was already compelled to wage a bitter struggle against the onslaught of the combined forces of the White Guard¹⁸ and the imperialists of other countries, and not merely against scattered pockets of resistance offered by internal counter-revolution.

"There is only one way out, which is allied military intervention," said British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour after a meeting of the foreign ministers of France, Italy and Great Britain in London in March 1918. He added hypocritically: "If Russia cannot help herself, she must be helped by her friends."

These imperialist "friends" were afraid that the working people of Soviet Russia, who had emancipated themselves from exploitation by big landowners and capitalists, might serve as an example for the peoples of other countries. To prevent this they launched a military campaign against the republic of workers and peasants. The anti-Soviet bloc included the large and still quite active forces of internal counter-revolution. The core of their striking force was the White Guard armies of former tsarist generals and admirals: Denikin, Kolchak, Wrangel and Yudenich, who had the wide backing of local and foreign capitalists. The invaders also pinned their hopes on revolts and conspiracies organised by the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and the remainder of the bourgeois-monarchist parties and splinter groups. Also operating against the Soviet republic was a 50-thousand strong Czechoslovak army corps¹⁹, which had captured a number of cities in the Volga region,

the Urals and in Siberia. And, finally, the Soviet republic was invaded by British, US, French, German, Japanese and other troops who landed in the north of Russia and in the Far East region, overran territories in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, and occupied many areas in the Ukraine and Byelorussia, the Baltic region, the Crimea, and the Don region. "World imperialism ... brought about the Civil War in our country and is responsible for protracting it," * wrote Lenin.

Thus, the world's first state of workers and peasants found itself ringed by hostile forces, being attacked by fourteen imperialist countries and by the troops of internal counter-revolution backed by these countries.

Embattled Soviet Republic

On September 2, 1918, the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of Soviets issued a decree which read

in part: "All the forces and all the resources of the socialist republic are to be used for the sacred cause of armed struggle against the foe." The Soviet republic was turned into a military camp. All citizens, regardless of their occupation and age, were obliged to perform their duties with regard to the defence of the country. All combat operations and the activities of military institutions were to be directed by the Revolutionary Military Council which was proclaimed the country's supreme military body and whose task was to carry out the military instructions of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshe-

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 30, p. 171.

viks), the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars.

Towards the autumn of 1918, a regime of strict discipline geared to the needs of the country which was under attack was established not only in the army and navy but also in such vital spheres as the war industry, transport and food supply.

As a result of the resolute and timely actions taken by the Communist Party and the Soviet government, the entire economic and socio-political life of the country in 1918-20 was put on a war footing. The Soviet government was in full control of all industrial production. It estimated the amount of grain and fodder needed by the state and on this basis set the production quota for each grain-growing region; state agencies conducted a grain requisitioning programme under which the peasants were to sell grain to the state at fixed government prices. Planned supply of all commodities to the population was carried out through a network of state-run shops. Foodstuffs were rationed. A system of universal labour service was established. All these measures, which were later called "war communism", were temporary, but they had to be taken in order to mobilise the then limited resources of the country for fighting the enemy and ensuring victory of Soviet power in the Civil War.

The Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Defence²⁰ were in charge of all important matters connected with the formation of Red Army units and mobilisation and deployment of manpower and material resources for meeting the needs of industrial centres and the front, and with the struggle against economic dislocation, famine and the fuel crisis.

The Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Defence, with the wholehearted support



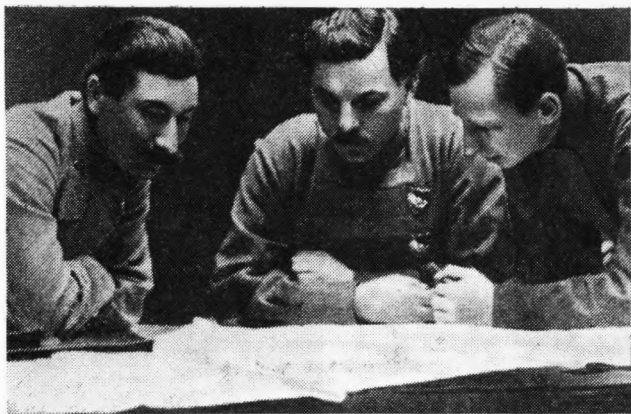
Mikhail Frunze.

of the working class and the peasantry, coordinated efforts at the front and in the rear, thus creating a firm foundation for the decisive victories of the Red Army.

"How did we act in the more critical moments of the Civil War? We concentrated our best Party forces in the Red Army; we mobilised the best of our workers," * Lenin wrote afterwards.

During the struggle against the invasion forces and the armies of the White Guards there emerged a number of outstanding Soviet military leaders and popular heroes: Mikhail Frunze and Jan Fabritsius, both veteran revolutionaries, Commander of the 25th Division Vasily Chapayev who came of peasant stock, Vasily Blyukher, a worker, and such commanders closely connected with the broad masses of the working people as Semyon Budyonny, Kliment Voroshilov, Grigory Kotovsky, Sergei Lazo, Alexander Parkhomenko, and Nikolai Schors.

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 33, p. 481.



Red Army commanders (left to right): Semyon Budyonny, Kliment Voroshilov and Andrei Bubnov.

The nationalised industry supplied the Red Army with weapons, munitions and other materiel.

The heroic labour of working men and women at factories and plants was supported by peasants who provisioned the army and population with food. In spite of the tremendous difficulties, state purchases of grain and fodder amounted to 107.9 million poods²¹ in the 1918 and 1919 period, 212.5 million poods in 1919-20, and 367 million poods in 1920-21. In addition, military procurement bodies operating jointly with local Soviets succeeded in securing 334 million poods of grain in the 1918-19 period for the Red Army and for the central industrial regions of the country.

The steady improvement in the operation of the railways under the supervision of the Council of Defence and of Lenin personally played an important part in the timely transportation of troops and

Mikhail Tukhachevsky.



foodstuffs. In 1919, close to 4,000 steam locomotives and about 21,000 carriages were repaired and put into operation. In 1920, these figures rose to 9,307 and to more than 100,000 respectively. In 1919, the railways were used by 12,500 military trains, and in 1920 their number reached 21,000.

The entire course of the struggle against the foreign invaders and the White Guards bore out the correctness of the Leninist policy of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Soviet government of drawing military specialists who served the old regime into the Red Army. Altogether about 50,000 former tsarist officers and generals, more than 10,000 former military officials and more than 40,000 army doctors and nurses were drafted into the armed forces of the Soviet republic over a period of two years (from July 2, 1918, to August 15, 1920). By the end of the Civil War and military intervention, former tsarist military specialists made up 34 to 35 per cent of the Red Army commanding corps.

They included such renowned army leaders as Sergei Kamenev, who was commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the republic from 1919 to 1924, Alexander Yegorov, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Boris Shaposhnikov, who were later promoted to the rank of Marshal, and generals Mikhail Bonch-Bruyevich, Dmitri Karbyshev, Alexander Samoilo, and many others.

Headquarters of Military Operations

With the beginning of the Civil War and military intervention, Lenin's office became the main headquarters of all military operations. It received detailed dispatches about combat operations, and from here telegrams were sent to all fronts. Under the chairmanship of Lenin at the meetings of the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Defence military-political and military strategic questions were discussed, and reports of the Chief Headquarters of the Red Army about the situation at the front were heard. In just one year of the Civil War (from January 1919 to January 1920), Lenin received eight reports from the Chief Headquarters of the Red Army about the strategic situation on the fronts, about the state of the armed forces of the republic and the measures taken to strengthen them.

What Sergei Kamenev called Lenin's "all-encompassing" knowledge of the situation at the front and of the plans and measures adopted by the People's Commissariat for the Army and Navy, and his penetrating analysis of the correlation of the military and socio-economic forces in the country, enabled him, the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Defence which he headed to

take prompt and often the only correct decisions on the most complicated and crucial matters of the organisation and activities of the Red Army, and to concentrate attention on that sector of the front which at some particular moment posed the greatest danger to the Soviet republic. As was noted then in the Records of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), "questions of national defence were discussed first of all, and the taken decisions carried out immediately".

In the extremely difficult conditions of the long and bitter Civil War, the Red Army defeated Denikin and Yudenich, Kolchak and Wrangel, and routed the shock troops of the imperialist powers which tried to strangle the newly-born state of workers and peasants.

In 1922, after the final defeat of the White Guards and foreign invaders and after the Civil War ended in Soviet Russia, the French writer Anatole France wrote: "Four years ago the Soviet republic was born in poverty. Being invincible, Soviet Russia was the bearer of the new spirit which threatened the existence of all governments of injustice and oppression... These governments attacked the Soviet republic, using everything—slander, their riches and force. They were out to strangle it. They sent gangs of bandits against it. The Soviet republic closed ranks, its Red ranks, and the bandits were defeated... If there are still any friends of justice left in Europe they should bow their heads out of respect for this revolution, which after so many centuries brought the world the first experiment in government by the people and for the people."

ALONG THE ROAD OF SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATIONS

In Spite of "Prophecies"

Right from the first days of its existence the Soviet republic concentrated its efforts on carrying out the main task of the revolution: the building of a socialist society. But the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois press in Russia and abroad, while ignoring facts, continued to speak about the instability and impermanence of Soviet rule, about its alleged inability to do anything positive and constructive. Here are some examples.

"They [the Bolsheviks] can only destroy but not build," said the semi-Menshevik newspaper *Novaya Zhizn* on December 1, 1917.

"The Soviet government could fall at any time, and no one in his right mind would give it more than a month to hold," commented the *Daily Telegraph* (Britain) on January 5, 1918.

"Reports from Moscow indicate that the situation in Russia is desperate. The economy has completely gone out of control. All the measures put forward by Lenin to save the country have failed. The general impression is that Bolshevism is at its last gasp," said *Le Figaro* (France) on March 23, 1919.

"...Bolshevik domination in Russia is coming to

an end. Its time has run out," prophesied *Die Neue Zeit* (Germany) on March 25, 1921.

We all know the true worth of these and many other similar prophecies. History has shown that under Lenin's guidance the Soviet government, made up of members of Lenin's party of the working class, lived up to the trust placed in it by the revolutionary people of Russia by consistently carrying out "...the programme, *approved by the whole* Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, for gradual, but firm and undeviating steps towards socialism". *

"Inimitable Political Realism"

In the complex situation of the first several years that followed the socialist revolution, the Council of

People's Commissars and its chairman, Lenin, attached special importance to foreign relations. The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs was from the very start under supervision and guidance of the Soviet government which consistently pursued a peaceful foreign policy.

The principled course, elaborated by Lenin and carried out under his leadership, of waging a consistent struggle to secure the Soviet republic's withdrawal from the imperialist war and to conclude a peace treaty, is a model of what Georgi Chicherin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, called "inimitable political realism and skilled diplomacy".

The Council of People's Commissars directed all major foreign policy actions of the country and the talks it held with diplomatic, semi-official and busi-

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, p. 307.

ness representatives of foreign countries. Lenin paid great attention to the makeup of Soviet delegations sent to international conferences and to bilateral talks with different countries, and took an active part in drafting diplomatic documents and preparing relevant actions. As a rule, he personally instructed Soviet diplomats about their assignments, and closely followed the course of the talks under way.

All important problems of Soviet foreign policy were discussed and decided jointly by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars.

Concern About the Future

Despite the difficult situation in the country, the Soviet government and Lenin looked to the future with confidence. The country was building the foundation of a new, socialist society. Even in the days of bitter fighting in the Civil War, when the future of the republic was at stake, the Soviet government directed the work of creating the economic basis of a socialist society. That is why the budget of the RSFSR for 1918-20 included large allocations for preparing and starting construction of electric power stations on the rivers Svir and Volkhov and in the towns of Shatura and Kashira, irrigation works in deserts in Turkestan, for building dams on the rivers Sukhova and Northern Dvina, and starting the construction of the Volga-Don canal.

The Soviet government paid special attention to the socialist transformation of Russia's economy on the basis of electrification, to the all-round development of science and technology, to providing in-

novators with facilities and to a comprehensive study and development of the country's natural resources. It was in those years that the necessary conditions were created for the successful building of a modern industry and for the rapid advance of science and technology, which was indispensable for solving important theoretical and practical problems connected with the development of the national economy.

"With the direct participation of the head of the first Soviet government and with his help, the basis was laid for such projects as radio and telephone engineering, utilisation of shale, mechanisation of timber cutting and hauling, production of chemically pure reagents in Russia, the exploration of the Kursk magnetic anomaly, irrigation of the Mugansk deserts, manufacture of diesel locomotives, the building of the power station on the Volkhov, utilisation of electricity in ploughing farm fields, the building of an electrical engineering research centre, the organisation of an electrical engineering department at the Moscow technical institute and the mounting of an agricultural exhibition. There was hardly an important initiative in Soviet Russia in the sphere of science and technology which was not linked with the name of Vladimir Ilyich," wrote Nikolai Gorbunov, secretary of the Council of People's Commissars, and later a member of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

To this we may add that Lenin took part in the setting up of a large number of research centres and institutes, such as the Central Aerohydrodynamic Institute, the Petrograd Physico-Technical Institute, the Atomic Commission, the State Optical Institute, the Fertilisers Institute and some other, and in the organisation of scientific and biological expeditions to the northern regions of the country

with a view to opening an Arctic Sea route, to the Kara Bugaz Gulf of the Caspian Sea, to the Khibin Mountains in the Kola Peninsula in the north-European part of Russia, and to Taimyr in Arctic Siberia, and many other projects.

Lenin and the Soviet government regarded electrification as being of the greatest importance for the rehabilitation and further development of the national economy. Back in February 1918, on Lenin's instructions, a group of specialists went to the coalfields near Moscow to find a suitable site for the building of the Kashira electric power station. Early that year, on Lenin's suggestion, Professor Genrikh Graftio drew up an estimate of expenditures for the building of the Volkhov power station. On December 26, 1919, after talking with the power engineer (and later Academician) Gleb Krzhizhanovsky, Lenin wrote him a letter outlining the main provisions of a plan for electrification which he considered to be a reliable basis for the development of industry. On January 23, 1920, after reading the draft of Krzhizhanovsky's article "The Tasks of Electrification in Industry", Lenin wrote him another letter, advising him to "add a *plan*, not a technical one (this, of course, is a job for *many* people, and not to be done in a hurry), but a political or state plan, i.e. a task for the proletariat", to write it in a way that would be understandable and convincing to the mass of workers and politically-aware peasants. "In 10-20 years," Lenin concluded, "we shall make all Russia, both industrial and agricultural, *electrical*."*

On Lenin's initiative, a State Commission for the Electrification of Russia (GOELRO) was set up to work out this plan. The commission, headed by

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 35, p. 435.

Gleb Krzhizhanovsky, was made up of about 200 leading scientists and engineers. Lenin took a personal interest in the work of the commission and often met and talked with its chairman and other members. On March 23, 1920, during a discussion of a draft provision of the GOELRO plan Lenin emphasised the urgency and importance of the commission's work for the electrification of the country, and stressed the need to publicise the GOELRO plan through the publication of books and pamphlets and organising public lectures on the subject. After it was approved by the 8th All-Russia Congress of Soviets in December 1920, and endorsed by the 9th All-Russia Congress of Soviets in December 1921, the GOELRO plan became the nation's first coordinated plan for the development of the national economy on the basis of electrification.

Replying to questions from a correspondent for the British *Daily Express*, Lenin wrote in February, 1920: "Electrification will completely transform Russia. Electrification carried out under the Soviet system will secure the creation of the foundations for the building of communism in our country..."*

Resolving the Nationalities Question

Of the various issues of the socio-economic life of the republic, the Soviet government attached particular importance to the

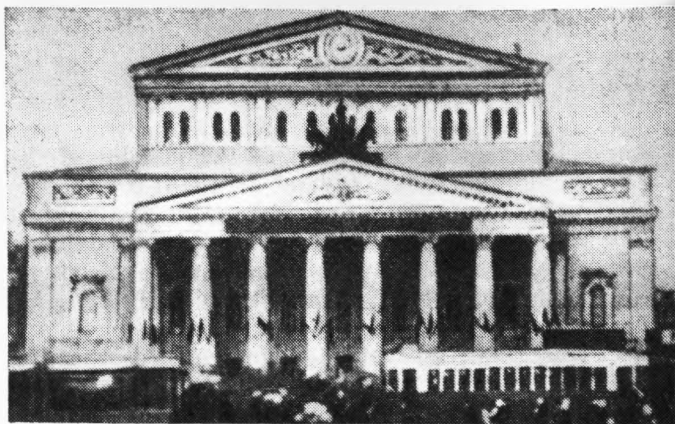
question of nationalities. The main principles of the Bolsheviks' programme on this question were embodied in the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia published by the Council of People's Commissars on November 3, 1917, and in the relat-

* V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 40 (in Russian), p. 148.

ed legislations abolishing all national privileges and restrictions and proclaiming the complete equality of all the peoples and nationalities.

As far back as December 1917, the Soviet government recognised the right of the peoples of the Ukraine, Finland and Poland to their state independence. In late 1918 and early 1919, the Council of People's Commissars proclaimed the independence of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Byelorussia, and denounced, on its own initiative, all the unequal agreements which the tsarist government and the Provisional Government together with other imperialist states had forced upon the peoples of Persia and Turkey. By so doing the workers' and peasants' government of Russia showed the whole world that its deeds accorded with its words. Consistent implementation of its nationalities policy helped the Soviet government win the trust of the working masses of the numerous peoples of Russia and to secure their firm support in the building of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This process was accomplished in four stages.

At the first stage (from November 1917 through the middle of 1918) the oppression of one nationality by another was done away with, and the formerly oppressed peoples were emancipated. Most of them won their nationhood for the first time in their history. This stage came to an end with the formation of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The Russian Federation, the first state of dictatorship of the proletariat, united many peoples of Russia on the principles of political and administrative Soviet autonomy, and thus it also became the first Soviet multi-national state which served as a model of state organisation for all the other Soviet republics.



On December 30, 1922, representatives of the four socialist republics—Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Transcaucasia—met at the Bolshoi Theatre for the First All-Union Congress of Soviets which adopted the Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the USSR.

At the next stage (mid-1919—late 1920) the newly born Soviet republics—Russia, the Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Byelorussia—formed a military union. The decree of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee issued on June 1, 1919, which formalised this union, provided for united actions of their military commands and their national economic councils, and for cooperation in railway transportation and finances, and between their commissariats for labour.

At the third stage (late 1920—mid-1922), which began after the Civil War and foreign military intervention ended, the military alliance of the Soviet republics was supplemented by an economic alliance so that the country's economy could be quickly restored and further developed. This alliance

THE 2000-2001 Season: From 1999-2000 to 2000-2001, the number of cases increased from 1,100 to 1,200.

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And the fourth stage, which covered the second half of 1922, was marked by the final military,

economic and political unification of independent Soviet republics into one federal state.

On the basis of the principles of Soviet federation evolved earlier, and of the experience of the development of Soviet nationhood over a period of five years, Lenin put forward the idea of creating a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a voluntary union of sovereign and equal Soviet republics, a new type of proletarian federative state.

The unification of four independent Soviet republics—Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Transcaucasian Federation* (the last comprised the Azerbaijan, Armenian and Georgian republics)—into one federal multinational state, the USSR, which was formalised on December 30, 1922, at the First All-Union Congress of Soviets, was a historic victory for Lenin's ideas of proletarian internationalism, equality and fraternal cooperation of the peoples.

Social Changes

In carrying out the political and economic tasks of the proletarian revolution the first Soviet government took steps to satisfy the immediate needs of the working people and improve their living standard.

On October 30, 1917, it issued a decree establishing the eight-hour working day. A special labour protection system was introduced for women and adolescents, and overtime work was strictly limited. Soon after free medical care was introduced. The

* The Baltic republics did not join the Union in 1922, because three years earlier, in 1919, Soviet government was overthrown there, and three bourgeois republics—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—were formed.

local Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies were empowered to rehouse working people from slums in flats which formerly belonged to the bourgeoisie and landowners.

The Soviet government also adopted a number of decrees and resolutions on public health service, social insurance and social security. One of the first legal acts of the new government was the decree of November 8, 1917 on doubling pensions for workers disabled by industrial injuries. On December 11, 1917 the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars adopted a decision on unemployment insurance, and on December 22 of the same year the All-Russia Central Executive Committee issued a decree on state insurance in the event of illness. The government insurance scheme covered all industrial and office workers who could not find jobs or who had been incapacitated owing to illness or injury.

The Soviet government resolutely eliminated all remnants of the old system of estates and of the serf-owning system. On November 12, 1917 the government published a decree, signed by Lenin and Sverdlov, on the abolition of old estates (the nobility, the merchants, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry), titles (princes, counts, etc.), and civic ranks, as well as all privileges and restrictions resulting therefrom, and of organisations and institutions that served the interests of these estates. From then on all people in the country were equal citizens of the Russian republic.

The decrees of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars issued in December 1917 on civil marriage, on children and on setting up public records offices (registration of marriages and divorces, births and deaths) replaced the old legislation on marriage and

family and the old legal system which reduced women to unequal status in society. After nationalising the land that had once belonged to churches and monasteries, after abolishing all national and religious privileges and restrictions, and after giving legal status to civil marriage, the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree (December 11, 1917) on making the People's Commissariat for Public Education responsible for all matters regarding the public education of children, which under the tsarist government was handled by the religious department. All these legal acts prepared the ground for the issuing of an historic decree on freedom of conscience and religious societies, which Lenin had carefully edited and which the Council of People's Commissars adopted on January 20, 1918. This decree proclaimed freedom of conscience and separation of the church from the state and the school from the church.

Cultural Revolution

The victory of the October Revolution cleared the way for a socialist cultural revolution. The Soviet government declared all museums, libraries and theatres public property. It proceeded immediately to the Herculean task of eliminating illiteracy, a harsh legacy of the old system of capitalists and landlords, and of creating a new, socialist culture.

The enormity of the effort undertaken by the Council of People's Commissars to raise the educational and cultural levels of the people was acknowledged even by those who were far from being friendly to Soviet Russia. For example, William Bullit, an American diplomat, noted, after a tour of Russia in the spring of 1919, that opera houses

and ballet theatres continued to function as they did in peace time. Thousands of new schools were opened in all parts of Russia, and the Soviet government seemed to have done more for public education in just eighteen months than tsarism had done over fifty years, he added.

The achievements of the People's Commissariat for Public Education headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky were impressive indeed. For instance, all Russian classics were published in editions of 3 to 5 million copies and were sold to the population at low prices. In 1918 the Soviet government allocated nine times as much money for public education as the Provisional Government and 18 times as much as the tsarist government had done in its last annual budget.

A most important role in the organisation of the massive drive against illiteracy was played by the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of December 26, 1919, signed by Lenin. In spite of the difficulties created by the Civil War and economic dislocation, the number of schools opened in the 1918-20 period increased by 13,000 and the number of pupils, almost by two million compared with the 1914-15 period. Simultaneously a great effort was made to train teaching personnel. Suffice it to say that in 1921, a little over three years after the socialist revolution, the Soviet government opened about 60 teachers' training institutes, and 152 three-year and 90 one-year teachers' training courses.

An important part of the plans to promote public education was the setting up of a wide network of public libraries. Already in 1920 and 1921, Soviet Russia had more than 20,000 public libraries; the number of cultural clubs grew during this period

from 200 to 4,597, and that of people's cultural centres from 110 to 7,134.

"The revolutionary government succeeded in repelling all invasions, in strengthening the Union of republics whose national life, which had almost been stifled by tsarism, has fully revived. It made superhuman efforts to overcome all sorts of calamities... famine and its terrible effects, such as child vagrancy, rural poverty, illiteracy... It fought for the implementation of its great plans of industrial and economic reconstruction initiated by the Soviets..." wrote the French author Romain Rolland.

THE STYLE OF WORK OF THE FIRST SOVIET GOVERNMENT

Lenin's Working Day

"Each time I recall the tremendous workload of Vladimir Ilyich, the ebullient energy with which he worked in so many different fields, which inspired everyone around him, and which seemed never to be at rest, I would ask myself: were the twenty-four hours a day in Lenin's life the same as in ours? For Vladimir Ilyich was in charge of the Political Bureau of the Party's Central Committee, of the Council of People's Commissars, of the Council of Labour and Defence²², of the work of the Small Council of People's Commissars²³, he personally directed the activities of the most vital spheres of the Soviet state's life, took an active part in the work of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, of the People's Commissariat for the Army and Navy, of the All-Russia National Economic Council, the State Planning Commission, of the organisations responsible for the supply of fuel, the activities of research centres and other bodies..." wrote Yakov Gindin, a veteran member of the Bolshevik Party, who in the 1920s was a member of the Small Council of People's Commissars. A biographical chronicle traces a typical working day, though by far not the busiest, of the head of the first Soviet government.

Lenin began the day of February 25, 1921 as

usual with the reading of newspapers and letters. On his desk was a pile of papers: domestic and foreign newspapers and magazines, telegrams and reports from People's Commissariats, and phoned messages from the People's Commissariat of Railways concerning the transportation of grain by rail to Moscow and Petrograd. These papers and dispatches brought into focus, as it were, all the most important problems in the life of the country: military, economic, diplomatic and cultural. It seemed impossible to find one's way in that stream of paperwork and to make the one, the only correct decision. But secretaries of the Council of People's Commissars knew, as they left Lenin's office after making their reports, that in a few hours all papers would have been read and would have numerous notes, exclamation points and question marks on them.

Lenin's remarkable ability to take in the contents of a newspaper article, letter or document at a glance had been noted by many. "If I had not seen tens and hundreds of times the amazing way in which Lenin read these documents, I would not have believed it possible," recalled Bonch-Bruyevich, the first head of the Soviet government's Administration Department. "To be able to do that, one would have to have that sharp and retentive memory, that lightning-quick reaction which Lenin had..."

At 11 a.m. Lenin wrote a letter to the Chairman of the State Planning Commission, Gleb Krzhizhansky, about the structure and personnel of the commission, and its methods of work. He then read a report, to which he added his comments, from the Chairman of the Commission for Fuel under the Council of Labour and Defence, Varlaam Ava-

nesov, about the causes of the fuel crisis and also about the work of the bodies responsible for fuel supply. He signed the identity card and a certificate of the special representative of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the People's Commissariat for Fuel, S. Klygin, who had been put in charge of hay storage in Tver Guberniya. After that Lenin wrote the text of a telegram conveying greetings and best wishes for success in its work to the Fifth All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets held in Kharkov.

Between 12 hours and 16.30 that day Lenin was at the meeting of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Party which discussed the fuel problem and river and railway transport, formulated theses about party-building work for the forthcoming 10th Communist Party Congress, and considered measures for protecting trains carrying grain from Siberia, questions relating to the demobilisation of troops, talks with Poland, some problems concerning Georgia, etc.

At 18 hours that day Lenin, as usual, opened the session of the Council of Labour and Defence. In the extremely difficult conditions of the first post-revolutionary years the Soviet government and the Council of Labour and Defence often had to consider a multitude of problems. For example, the agenda of the CLD session on that day included twelve items, among which were: production of textiles for demobbed Red Army men, supply of food and clothing to workers of Moscow and Petrograd, a draft statute for regional economic bodies, bread rationing for army units on the Caucasian front, the situation in Donbass, workforce for construction projects in the Urals, etc.

In the course of the meeting Lenin instructed his

secretary to tell Ivan Teodorovich, a member of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Agriculture, that he would be busy at 3 p.m. the next day, and asked to be reminded of Teodorovich's request for an appointment, passed on to the secretary a note he had received from the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Trade, Andrei Lezhava, about a request for an appointment from S. Ruzhichka, an electrical engineer, on which Lenin had written the words "I'll see him. Please remind me"; signed a decision of the Council of People's Commissars dated February 24, 1921, instructing the People's Commissariat for Justice to confer a government decoration upon Dmitry Karnakov, Chairman of the Vyatka Council of People's Judges, etc. Late that day, after the meeting of the Council of Labour and Defence, Lenin and Krupskaya visited the hostel of the All-Russia Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops and talked to its students about their studies, about literature and art.

The fact that Lenin was able to do so much work at the Central Committee of the Party, in the Council of People's Commissars, at the Council of Labour and Defence and at other central bodies of the republic, and also carry out social and political activities and write theoretical and publicistic works, was largely due to his self-discipline. In the spring of 1918 Lenin called on the Party and all working people to regard efficient organisation of work as a priority task. Lenin himself was a model of administrative efficiency and organisation. This is what Georgi Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, wrote about Lenin. "Wherever he happened to be, his work, in fact his whole day, was always strictly planned. Such orderliness can be found in his books and papers... In all our work he taught us to do things in an orderly way. He always dem-

anded that things should be in good order, for example, that papers and reports should be clearly numbered, that everything should be done according to the rules. . .”

Lenin attached special importance to a conscientious and responsible attitude to work, to constant and careful supervision over the practical implementation of the decisions of the Soviet government and his personal instructions. He was extremely demanding with regard to the timely and precise fulfilment of even minor assignments, such as the prompt transmission of phone messages or the delivery of packages. Attached to the minutes of the meetings of the Council of People's Commissars was usually an itemised list of all the things that had already been done. On Lenin's instructions there was always an officer on duty in the telephone room adjoining his office. The Administration Department kept a register of all incoming and outgoing telegrams and phoned-in messages, which was checked by Lenin himself. People's Commissars and members of government departments reported regularly to Lenin himself.

Busy as he was as head of the Soviet government, Lenin devoted constant attention to increasing Party control over the work of the state apparatus, to ensuring the consistent implementation of democratic centralism and socialist legality as the most important principles in the activity of the new, socialist state. At the same time he insisted on strict observance of the laws and decrees of the Soviet government and adherence to the work procedure established for the Soviet state apparatus, which provided for combining collective leadership in discussing and solving problems with personal responsibility of each official for his assigned task.

Meetings of the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Labour and Defence

The sessions of the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Labour and Defence presided over by Lenin were the principal form of collective work of the Soviet government

in the first few years after the revolution.

In those years the leading bodies of the Soviet state met almost every night. The meetings were held in the so-called Red Hall which adjoined Lenin's office, where two long tables covered with red cloth stood end to end. One of the documents of the Administration Department of the Council of People's Commissars dated June 1918, says: "The Council of People's Commissars works late into the night and ends at 2 or 3 a.m. the next morning."

On December 18, 1917, the Soviet government approved the procedure suggested by Lenin for introducing questions on the agenda. Any question to be submitted for consideration by the Council of People's Commissars was to be put down in writing (not more than 2-3 pages); draft decrees or decisions of the Council of People's Commissars or the Council of Labour and Defence were to be submitted together with comments and suggestions made by all interested Commissariats and government departments. This and other procedures suggested by Lenin were followed in the everyday work of the Council of People's Commissars, the Council of Labour and Defence and the Small Council of People's Commissars, and served as a model for the boards of People's Commissariats and all other government bodies at all levels.

"Vladimir Ilyich was as punctual as a clock, and demanded the same of us," recalled Nikolai Semashko, the first People's Commissar for Public

Health. "If anyone turned up late at a meeting Lenin regarded this as a violation of labour discipline and impermissible loss of time.

"As presiding chairman at meetings of the Council of People's Commissars, Lenin always followed the adopted procedure and, looking at his watch, reminded those who talked too long: 'This is not a public rally, comrades; we don't need political agitation here; let's talk to the point'."

The minutes of the Council of People's Commissars included many notes written by Lenin giving the names of those who attended the meetings and opposite each name the amount of time taken for stating a case. In his reminiscences of Lenin, Anatoly Lunacharsky wrote: "Under Lenin the atmosphere at the Council of People's Commissars was one of efficiency and high spirits. He laid down the procedure for considering matters: it was marked by strict time limits for speakers, which were mandatory for the Council's own speakers, for all other speakers and for all taking part in the discussion. Lenin insisted on the maximum brevity of the presentation and on businesslike approach. The atmosphere that reigned in the Council of People's Commissars was one of concentrated attention. It seemed that time itself became denser as a result of so many facts, thoughts and decisions being crammed into each minute."

While presiding at the Council's meetings Lenin also took an active part in the discussions. In his memoirs L. Ruzer, a member of the Board of the People's Commissariat for Food Supplies, wrote: "In the first place he skilfully directed the proceedings of the meetings. He saw to it that the meetings were orderly and that the speakers did not exceed the allotted time limits, and also that the rules on smoking were observed. At the same time he took

a most active part in the discussions on every question raised. It was very rare that Vladimir Ilyich did not speak out on any question, expressing his views and making a thorough analysis of all the points involved. To do that, of course, he listened attentively to every speaker and gave careful thought to his arguments. All this did not prevent him from doing something else still. He was always either studying some memorandum connected with the matter in hand, or was getting an encyclopaedic dictionary, an atlas or some other reference book to find what he wanted for the discussion."

This ability of Lenin to give his attention simultaneously to two or even three different matters was a source of surprise to all who took part in the meetings of the Soviet government, especially when Lenin took the floor and gave a penetrating analysis of the reports and speeches heard at the meeting, pointing out their positive and negative aspects.

The meetings of the Soviet government under Lenin's guidance were a genuine school of statesmanship for the People's Commissars and other Soviet leaders. "That was the first and only university in the world at that time where People's Commissars were taught to build a government of workers and Peasants," wrote Grigori Petrovsky, who at that time was People's Commissar for Internal Affairs. "How many times had Vladimir Ilyich, during meetings of the Council of People's Commissars, brought a speaker down to earth by asking one simple question, 'And how much will that cost?'" Lenin taught Soviet government workers not to wander off from the practical tasks of real life, not to be carried away by grandiose and unrealisable plans, and to learn to consider and weigh all aspects of a problem, to foresee difficulties before they arose and to view things in perspective.

While commanding great respect among his colleagues, Lenin never tried to force his opinion on the participants in meetings, and always strictly followed the principle of collective leadership. "As Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Vladimir Ilyich never tried to decide questions which concerned the whole collective on his own, so to speak. He encouraged all of us to show initiative. He never used his prestige to put pressure on us; instead, he used persuasion. Flattery and toadying were not tolerated by Lenin. At the meetings of the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Labour and Defence all the participants freely expressed their views on all problems discussed. Questions were decided by voting. Heated debates were common at such meetings; it happened sometimes that a majority of members of the Council of People's Commissars voted for decisions which Lenin disagreed with... However, if a question was of particular importance Lenin, acting in accordance with the principles adopted by the Party and the Soviets, would stand by his opinion and refer the matter to a higher body, such as the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, the Political Bureau of the Party, a plenary meeting of the Central Committee or even a Party congress," recalled Lydia Fotiyeva, secretary of the Council of People's Commissars.

Such were the main features of the style of work of the first Soviet government, which may be characterized as strict orderliness combined with a free, creative atmosphere ensuring true collectivism and enabling each to use his knowledge, experience and talent to the full. Everyone present at the Council's meetings, whether a People's Commissar or a person specially invited to take part in the discussion of a particular problem, made his or her

contribution to the work of the Soviet government. This considerably helped the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Defence in the task of drafting and adopting numerous decrees and resolutions with the help of which, within the first few years after the revolution, all forms of social and national oppression were eradicated and the foundations of a new social and state system were laid. "We had perfect teamwork at the Council of People's Commissars and were always in high spirits and good humours," recalled Anatoly Lunacharsky. "Lenin would burst out laughing when he caught somebody saying something odd and self-contradictory, and then all the others down the long table—veteran revolutionaries as well as newcomers—would laugh, too, either at the jokes of the Chairman himself, who loved quipping, or of one of the speakers. But immediately after this outburst of laughter, the same seriousness would return and the same flow of discussion, decision-making and exchange of views."

**"The World's
Biggest Reception
Room"**

Constant links with the masses, day-to-day association with working people—this was one of the most characteristic features of Lenin's style of leadership, a principle which the first Soviet government and its leader never abandoned.

"Living in the *midst* of the people.

Knowing the people's *mood*.

Knowing *everything*.

Understanding the people.

Having the right approach.

Winning the *absolute* trust of the masses.

The leaders must not lose touch with the people they lead; the vanguard must not lose touch with the entire army of labour."*

Those were the tasks Lenin set before the members of the first Soviet government, before all Communists, before all officials of the Soviet state apparatus.

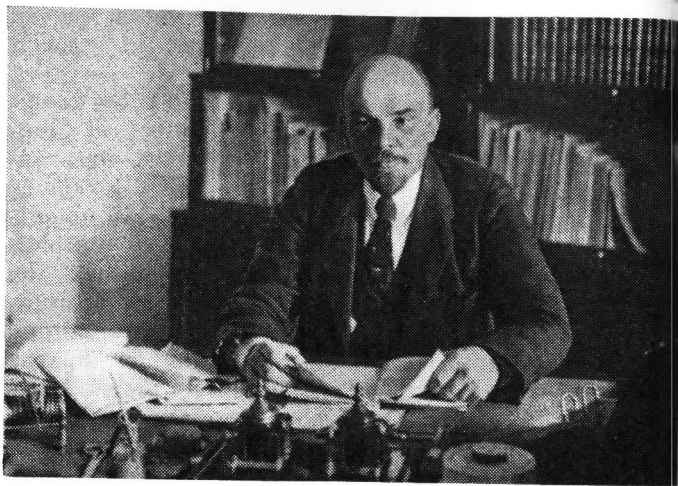
Firm links with the working people, this important feature of the Leninist Council of People's Commissars as a new type of government was the most complete expression of proletarian democracy.

Lenin pointed out the importance of obtaining all relevant information on a question for making well-based decisions. "We need all the facts", "give us facts", "send us reports more often, and more detailed reports", "send us detailed information", "collect all necessary material", insisted Lenin as he considered different problems that came to the attention of the Central Committee of the Communist Party or the Soviet government.

The extensive correspondence maintained by Lenin and other members of the government, their regular meetings with workers and peasants, scientists and cultural workers, Party officials, members of Soviets, economists and military specialists, and the speeches of working people themselves at public meetings not only provided the first Soviet government with links with the masses. They also served as a vast source of information a careful study of which enabled them to make the necessary and the only correct decisions.

Albert Rhys Williams wrote: "Of course, out of his university education, out of his travels, out of his own 30 volumes that he wrote, Lenin knew in-

* V. I. Lenin, *A Biography*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 469.



Lenin in his Kremlin office.

finitely more, theoretically, academically, than the Tambov mujik could ever know. But, on the other hand, out of the hard school of bitter life and toil, the mujik knew a lot of things practically. In him was the wisdom of the soil. And what he knew Lenin was eager to know. Like all truly great men he was humble enough to understand that even the most illiterate had something to give him. Thus his lines of information reached out into the most varied places and peoples. And the thousands of facts gathered in, he carefully weighed, sifted, analysed. And that gave him that advantage over his enemies that enabled him so often to outwit and outmaneuvre them. He didn't have to guess about the attitude and ideas of the Siberian peasant, the Red Armyist or the Cossack of the Don. It was no secret to him what the Leningrad moulder, the Volga

bargeman, or the Moscow charwoman were thinking and feeling."

That is why, as Williams remarked, Lenin's reception room was the "biggest in the world". That is why the head of the first Soviet government always found time in his busy schedule to meet and talk to the numerous visitors: peasants from remote provinces, groups of workers and soldiers, Soviet and Party officials, representatives of the professional classes, participants in the international working-class and national-liberation movement, foreign diplomats and journalists. As a rule, Lenin received two or three persons a day, but the number of visitors in the reception room of the Council of People's Commissars was often much bigger. On February 9, 1921, for example, Lenin spent more than four hours talking to various people. He received Deputy People's Commissar for Agriculture V. Obolensky (Ossinsky), A. Paikes, a member of the Board of the People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, Bela Kun, Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, O. Chernov, a Siberian peasant, M. Pokrovsky, assistant to the People's Commissar for Education, F. Dzerzhinsky, Chairman of the All-Russia Extraordinary Commission, and Ya. Ganetsky, Ambassador Plenipotentiary of the RSFSR to Latvia. "What made Lenin great?" recalled O. Chernov about his meeting with Vladimir Ilyich that day. "Here's what. It wasn't me he was listening to as someone important. But through me he was listening to the entire peasantry..."

Alongside personal meetings with people Lenin attached great importance to correspondence with local Party organisations and Soviets, government offices and departments, industrial establishments and individual citizens. The known correspondence

Lenin maintained over the five years after the Revolution contains 3,600 documents, or about 720 letters a year, about 60 letters a month, which makes it two letters a day. The number of letters, telegrams, notes and other correspondence that the head of the first Soviet government received from his colleagues, from working people in Russia and from abroad ran into thousands. In just a few months—from January 1 to November 1, 1921—the Council of People's Commissars received more than 9,000 letters, appeals, applications, etc. From November 1917 and on the mail received by the Council of People's Commissars was sorted and sent on to relevant members of the Soviet government. Somewhat later, the reception office of the Council of People's Commissars had a special department where all the incoming mail was sorted and then passed on either to the Council of People's Commissars or to relevant People's Commissariats and other central government offices.

Another important aspect of the Soviet government's activity was the participation of its members in the work of various conferences and congresses, their meetings with workers, soldiers and peasants at factories, army units, villages, etc.

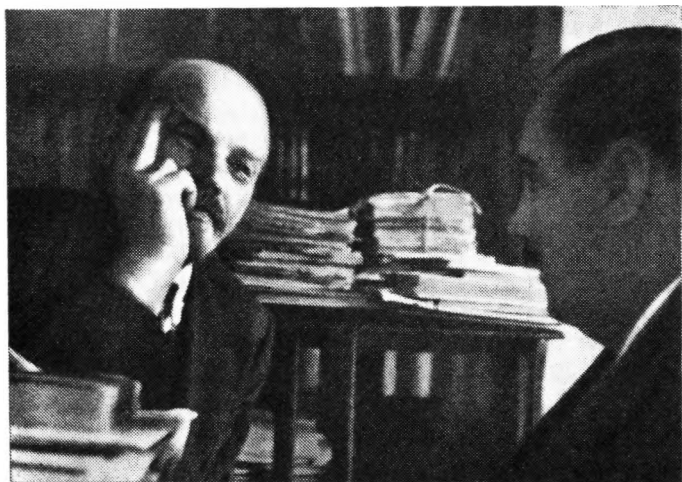
Lenin emphasised on many occasions the paramount importance of oral propaganda for the success of the proletarian revolution and the building of a socialist society. He believed that every senior Party and government official should personally inform working people about the country's situation at home and its position in the world, about the most important acts of the Soviet government. That is why from the spring of 1918 public meetings were held in Moscow every Friday. They were addressed by members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of People's Commis-

sars, and by leaders of Party and trade union organisations and of Soviets. Lenin himself was an example of a true proletarian leader, one with close links with the masses. In just five years, from March 1918, when the Council of People's Commissars moved from Petrograd to Moscow, until 1923, Lenin made at least 250 speeches at meetings and rallies held in Moscow and its suburbs.

In Lieu of an Epilogue: THE ERROR OF H. G. WELLS

In the autumn of 1920 the English writer H. G. Wells visited Soviet Russia. Those were difficult days for the young Soviet republic which was still at war with the White Guards and foreign interventionists and was in the midst of economic dislocation and a food-and-fuel crisis. On October 6, Lenin received Wells in the Kremlin, and the two men had a long talk about the present and future of Russia, about the situation in Britain in those days and about the electrification plan. Soon after his return to Britain Wells published a book entitled *Russia in the Shadows* in which he gave a very vivid picture of the war-ravaged country which, according to him, was on the verge of collapse. Wells admitted that he did not understand Marxism, but at the same time surprised his readers with the bold conclusion that the terrible state Russia was in was not the work of the Bolsheviki, but of the White Guards and the foreign imperialists. Significantly, Wells emphasised that it was Soviet power, and not any other, that enjoyed the support of the overwhelming majority of the population, and that the Soviet government was the only possible government in Russia.

In his book H. G. Wells described the indelible impression which Lenin made on him, but referred



Lenin with H. G. Wells.

to Lenin's plan for the electrification of the country as a utopia.

"Can one imagine a more courageous project in a vast flat land of forests and illiterate peasants, with no water power, with no technical skill available, and with trade and industry at the last gasp?

"I cannot see anything of the sort happening in this dark crystal of Russia, but this little man in the Kremlin can; he sees the decaying railways replaced by a new electric transport, sees new roadways spreading throughout the land, sees a new and happier Communist industrialism arising again. While I talked to him he almost persuaded me to share his vision."

In view of Wells' doubts about what he thought was a sheer fantasy, Lenin suggested that he come back to Soviet Russia in some ten years and see

what was done by then. And when in 1934 Wells again came to Soviet Russia and made a tour of the country, he could see for himself that his predictions had proved wrong. Lenin's electrification plan had been carried out. In his new book, *Experiment in Autobiography*, H. G. Wells acknowledged the undeniable successes of socialism and, recalling his earlier conversation with the "Dreamer in Kremlin", wrote that after fourteen years since their meeting he became even more convinced that Lenin was really a great man.

Under Lenin's leadership the Bolshevik Party and the first Soviet government carried out a mammoth task of defending the gains of the proletarian revolution and building the foundations of a socialist society. Within a little over six decades after the October Revolution, the Soviet state has turned from a country marked by poverty and backwardness, which H. G. Wells saw on his first trip to Russia, into one of the world's leading industrial powers.

NOTES

- 1 *Guberniya*, the principal administrative and territorial unit in tsarist Russia, composed of districts (*u y e z d s*). The territorial government reforms implemented in 1923-29 reorganized the guberniyas and renamed them territories (*krais*) and regions (*oblasts*).
- 2 In the days of the July 1917 crisis the bourgeois Provisional Government, among other reprisals against the Bolsheviks, issued an order for Lenin's arrest, which forced him to go into hiding.
- 3 *Smolny*, the building of the former Smolny Institute for Young Ladies of Noble Birth. In February 1917 the premises of the Smolny Institute were occupied by the Petrograd Soviet and the Military Revolutionary Committee. During the armed uprising in October 1917 the Smolny was the headquarters of the revolutionary forces.
- 4 The first All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was held in June, 1917, when the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) and the Mensheviks, who had a majority in it, supported the Provisional Government and in this way demonstrated their opposition to the revolution. The good point about the Congress was that it united all the Soviets in Russia into a formidable force.
- 5 *Anatoly Lunacharsky* (1875-1933), statesman and public figure who played an important part in organising and developing the Soviet system of public education and in the cultural resurgence of Soviet Russia. He did a great deal to rally the old Russian intelligentsia around the Soviets and create a new intelligentsia from among people of worker and peasant origin.

- 6 *Alexandra Kollontai* (1872-1952), a professional revolutionary who took an active part in the 1905 Revolution. After the February 1917 Revolution she returned to Russia from her political exile and was elected a member of the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet, for which she was persecuted by the bourgeois Provisional Government. After the victory of the October Socialist Revolution she was elected a member of the first Soviet government as People's Commissar responsible for the welfare of the homeless, of minors and orphans, old people and the unemployed, as well as for social security. In later years she held several senior posts in the government, the Communist Party and the diplomatic service.
- 7 The task of drafting the theses on the question of war and peace as well as on the questions of the land and political power in the country was assigned to Lenin by a special decision of the Central Committee of the RSDLP (Bolsheviks) shortly before the opening of the Congress on October 21, 1917.
- 8 The First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies was held in May 1917.
- 9 *Desyatina*, the principal pre-metric Russian unit of land measure, equalling 1.04 hectares (2.5 acres).
- 10 *Multi-sectoral economy*. In the period from the 1917 Revolution to the early 1930s five social and economic sectors existed in Soviet Russia: a subsistence economy, small-commodity production, private capitalist enterprise, state-controlled capitalism, and socialism. The leading and dominant economic sector was socialism.
- 11 *All-Russia Central Executive Committee*, the supreme legislative, administrative and supervisory body of the Soviet state which from 1917 to 1937 functioned between Congresses of Soviets.
- 12 *Supreme Council of the National Economy* was handling all matters concerning the guidance of Soviet industrial enterprises from 1917 to 1932.
- 13 *Zemstvo*, an elected body of local government which existed in Russia from 1864 to 1918.
- 14 *Alexander Kerensky* (1881-1970), one of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party leaders, who was appointed chairman of the bourgeois Provisional Government in July,

1917. After the October Revolution he organized an unsuccessful revolt against the Soviets and fled from Russia.

- 15 *Yakov Sverdlov* (1885-1919), a prominent figure in the Communist Party and the Soviet state, professional revolutionary, a Party member since 1901, spent more than 12 years under tsarism in prison and exile. From 1912 was a member of the Central Committee of the Party and in the days of the October Revolution, a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee. He was one of the organisers of the First Congress of the Communist International.
- 16 In 1918 the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik) was renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), in 1925—the All-Russia Communist Party of Bolsheviks, and in 1952—the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- 17 *Nadezhda Krupskaya* (1869-1939), active participant in the October Revolution, a prominent state and Party figure, Lenin's wife and helper.
- 18 *White Guard*, the general term for counter-revolutionary military contingents and illegal military organisations operating on the territory of the former Russian Empire with the support of foreign capitalists in the years of the Civil War and military intervention against the Soviet government.
- 19 *The Czechoslovak corps*, made up mostly of prisoners of war of the defeated Austro-Hungarian armies, was organised in Russia in September 1917 by the Provisional Government, the Czechoslovak National Council and the military diplomatic missions of some European countries. Despite the neutral position of the majority of the members of this corps, its commanding officers succeeded in involving the soldiers in a rebellion against the Soviet government.
- 20 *The Council of Defence*, the supreme emergency body of the Soviet state in the Civil War and the principal military, economic and planning centre of the republic. In 1920 it was reorganised into the Council of Labour and Defence.
- 21 *Pood*, an old Russian measure of weight equalling 40 pounds, or 16.38 kg.

- 22 *The Council of Labour and Defence* was in charge of the defence of the country and of economic affairs. It was set up in 1920 as a commission of the Council of People's Commissars and functioned until 1937.
- 23 *Small Council of People's Commissars* (1917-31) was a permanent commission attached to the Council of People's Commissars, set up to relieve the government of minor business and to prepare draft resolutions and decrees. It was abolished in 1931.

Михаил Павлович Ирошников
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Mikhail IROSHNIKOV Ph.D. (History) is a senior researcher in the Leningrad branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of the History of the USSR. A history and law graduate of Leningrad University, he specialises in the history of the early Soviet period. He is the author of more than 100 studies of these problems.

